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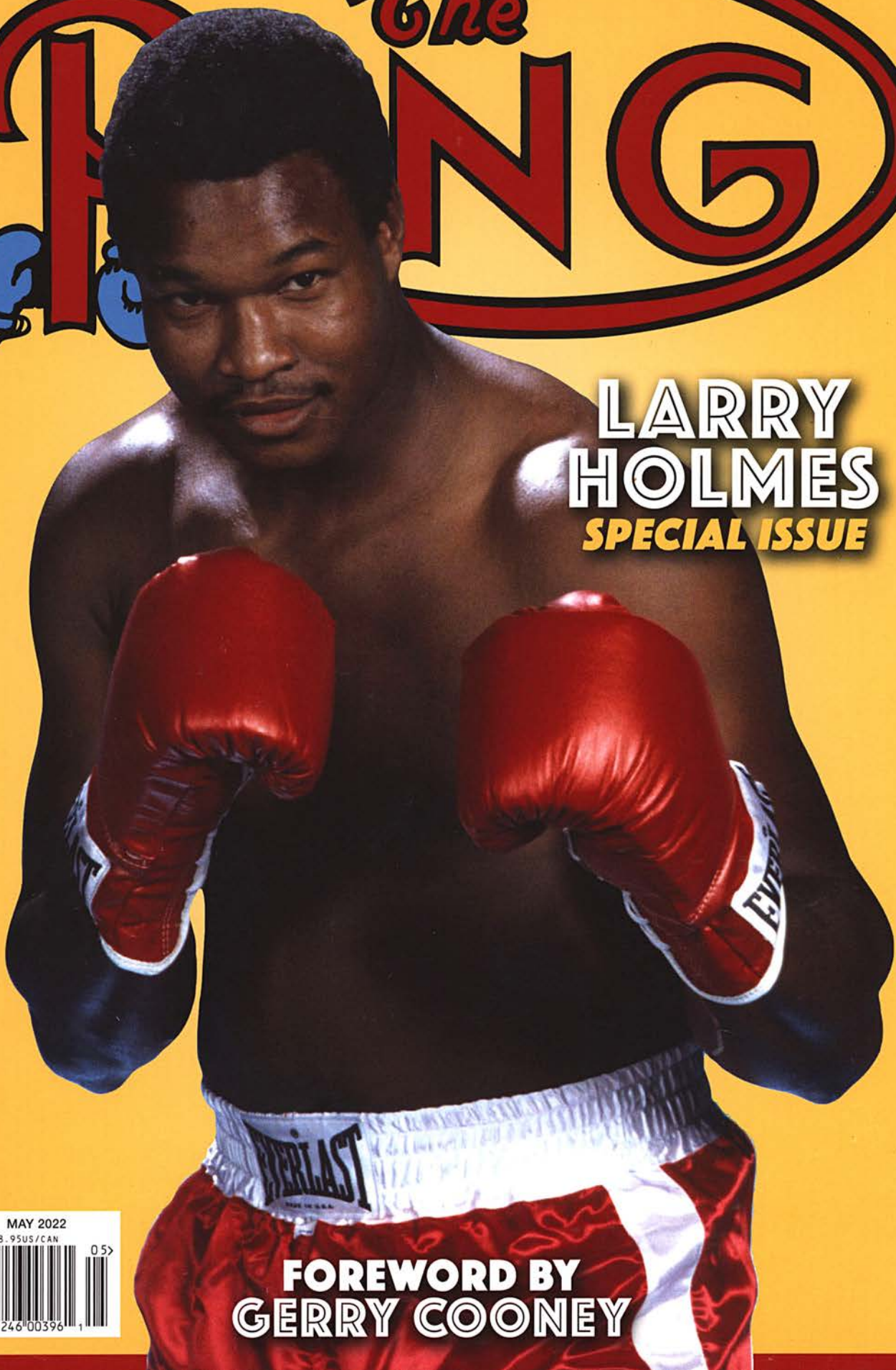

LARRY HOLMES
SPECIAL ISSUE

FOREWORD BY
GERRY COONEY

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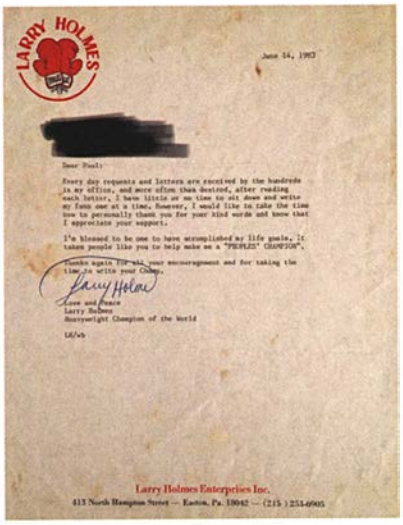
COVER PHOTO BY GLOBE PHOTOS, INC/GLOBE PHOTOS

Larry Holmes, pictured alongside then-WBC president Jose Sulaiman, picked up that organization's title in June 1978 and made 16 consecutive defenses. The WBC and WBA were separated for a long period of time, but with The Ring and lineal distinctions attached to his name, Holmes was unquestionably the man to beat. He relinquished the WBC crown in 1983 and became the newly formed IBF's maiden heavyweight titleholder. Over a seven-and-a-half-year reign, "The Easton Assassin" would make 20 successful championship defenses in total, establishing himself as one of the greatest champions of all time.



June 14, 1983

[redacted]

Dear Paul:

Every day requests and letters are received by the hundreds in my office, and more often than desired, after reading each letter, I have little or no time to sit down and write my fans one at a time. However, I would like to take the time now to personally thank you for your kind words and know that I appreciate your support.

I'm blessed to be one to have accomplished my life goals. It takes people like you to help make me a "PEOPLE'S CHAMPION".

Thanks again for all your encouragement and for taking the time to write your Champ.

Love and Peace
Larry Holmes
Heavyweight Champion of the World

LH/vb

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A LETTER FROM LARRY

I first heard of Larry Holmes in 1980 when I was 10. I was desperately wanting Muhammad Ali to win. He was my favorite fighter. Holmes won.

Then, I became slightly obsessed with boxing. I would subscribe to boxing magazines that would get sent from America to my hometown of Rockhampton, Australia, each month. It cost my parents a fortune.

I became a fan of Larry Holmes just by reading reports of his fights, in particular his battle against Trevor Berbick. By the time he fought Gerry Cooney in June 1982, I was convinced I was the "Easton Assassin's" biggest fan.

I would always argue with my dad who was the greatest. He would say Rocky Marciano. I was Larry Holmes. Holmes' lightning jab, the crisp sharpness of his combinations, his output, his ring intelligence and his powers of recovery. Any heavyweight from past eras, Ali included, would have had a tough time beating him.

After his fight with Tim Witherspoon in May 1983, I wrote to Larry Holmes. I thought it would be magic if I could go to school and show off a letter from the heavyweight champion of the world, my sporting hero. I had no idea of a specific address for the champ, so I just addressed it to:

Larry Holmes
Easton, Pennsylvania
United States of America

I knew he lived in Easton because the Ring Magazine ratings had that below his name. To my amazement, a month later, I got a letter in the post. It had the Holmes logo on the outside of the envelope. This was nearly 40 years ago, but I still remember the joy it gave me. I actually didn't expect it. I was showing my parents in breathless disbelief. I took a chance and here it was – a signed letter from Larry Holmes, "The People's Champion." Sure, he didn't hand write the letter. It was typed up by his secretary, but Larry had clearly told her what to type – and it was signed.

At the school show-and-tell the next day, my classmates and teachers couldn't believe it. The whole school now knew about Larry Holmes. Some other kids wanted to write to him, too. A small town in country Queensland had kids talking about Larry Holmes. A wonderful childhood memory.

Paul Hoffmann

I grew up in Las Vegas. My uncle invited me to my first-ever boxing event. The location was the Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion. It was Ron Lyle vs. Scott LeDoux. Earnie Shavers was there, as well as a gentleman who was confined to a wheelchair: "The Brown Bomber" himself, Mr. Joe Louis. (Side note: A guy sitting next to me said, "Kid, I'll give you five bucks if you go and get Joe Louis' autograph." I immediately jumped up and sealed the deal.) Jimmy Lennon Sr. was the announcer and Don King was the promoter. I noticed Larry Holmes – he was wearing a white Pony jumpsuit with red trim. I approached him and asked, "Sir, can I get your autograph?" He stretched out his hand, took the pen, and as he was signing my flier, he looked at me and said, "Kid, if I had a dollar for every mo-fo that asked me for a goddamn autograph, I would be rich." Good times.

Kyte Monroe
Norwalk, California

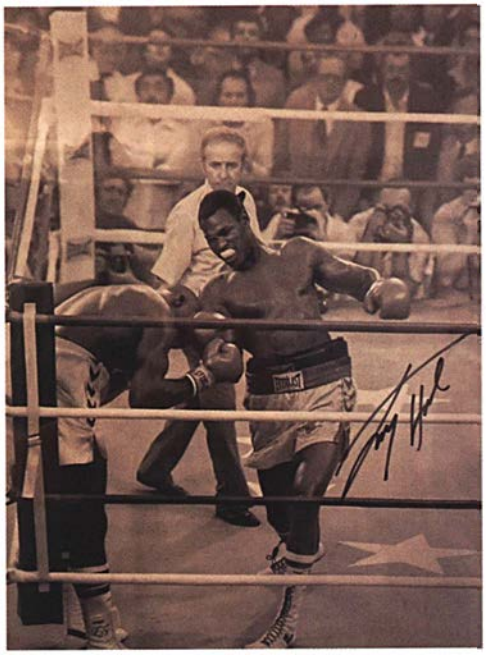
Larry Holmes is a rare breed of fighter; along with the likes of Lennox Lewis and Marvin Hagler, he was offered mixed respect in some circles whilst he was fighting yet is revered, applauded and celebrated (rightly so) deep into his retirement.

Larry turned pro a couple of months after I was born. By the time I had turned 10 years old, he had solidified his status as the best heavyweight in the world at that time.

I was able to watch delayed highlights of several of his title defenses via ITV in the U.K. Wins over the likes of Ken Norton, Tim Witherspoon, Gerry Cooney, Marvis Frazier and Leon Spinks. People talk about his losses to Michael Spinks, and whilst I felt that Spinks deserved the first fight, Larry certainly deserved to win the rematch. Every time I watch it on YouTube, I still score it for Holmes.

I really wish the Tyson fight had never happened in 1988. Larry had come back from a long layoff with not much time to prepare, and he was up against a marauding champion close to his prime.

His comeback victory over Ray Mercer three years later was simply



sensational. He schooled Mercer in that fight, and let's not forget that Mercer was coming off a career-best victory over the late Tommy Morrison.

Larry was an exceptional champion, hard-working with amazing recuperative powers and an absolute piston for a left jab. His jab ranks up there as one of the greatest jabs in heavyweight history. He also looked after his money and lives very comfortably today – something that you can rarely say with the bulk of heavyweights from the 1980s.

He has been over to the U.K. several times (although I've yet to meet him) and I have a signed photo of him in my house, from his amazing title win over Earnie Shavers!

For me, he's still the best heavyweight since Muhammad Ali and is certainly in my top 5 list of greatest heavyweights of all time.

Paul Wickes
Bath, U.K.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

I just received the February 2022 issue of The Ring, which looks like a great issue celebrating 100 years of the magazine, but yet again there is a focus on the past instead of the present.

I understand the reasons for the 100-year anniversary issue, but the prior four issues all had retired fighters on the cover, and two of these were devoted almost exclusively to a retired fighter (Chavez and Trinidad).

There have been two big heavyweight fights recently: Fury-Wilder 3 and Usyk-Joshua – and neither fight had a feature written. I don't see how a boxing magazine can justify not covering a fight for the heavyweight championship in favor of a fighter who is long retired?

These issues covering fighters from the past worked during the pandemic when there was little big-fight action, but not now. If current fighters don't get the coverage they deserve, the popularity of the sport will suffer.

Glen Fuschillo
London

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: It's a balancing act, Glen. Fights are still regularly being disrupted by the ongoing pandemic, and we have to commit to our content a month before the magazine arrives to subscribers. Current fighters are safely in the hands of the internet, and you'll find in-depth day-to-day coverage on our website, RingTV.com, and through our Twitter and Instagram feeds. But the main reason we've been doing a lot of historical special issues, like the one you're holding, is that we really enjoy producing them, and the reception from our readers has been overwhelmingly great (perhaps because, ironically, they are tired of coverage focused too much on current fighters). We're not living entirely in the past, though. Hopefully you enjoyed the attention given to the fights you mentioned in our March 2022 issue (with Fury-Wilder 3 taking Fight and Round of the Year honors and Joshua-Usyk nabbing Upset of the Year) and the "fantasy fight cards" involving active athletes in our April 2022 edition.

I thoroughly enjoyed Ron Lipton's most recent "Mythical Matchup" of Greb vs. Ketchel in your April 2022 issue. All of his articles have provoked interesting speculation and are well-written. When there has been a dramatic decrease in scheduled bouts during the COVID pandemic, your entire staff has produced some of its best issues featuring material from the rich archives of The Ring. I hope you will continue this work as the boxing calendar returns to normal. Thank you.

Bob Yahn
Washington, D.C.

CORRECTION: On page 39 of the April 2022 issue, a photo of Josh Warrington was mistakenly used instead of Mauricio Lara.

WRITE TO THE RING! Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209 comeoutwriting@gmail.com
★ Emailed letters will include a writer's email address unless a city and state of origin are provided. Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.

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FOREWORD BY GERRY COONEY

A GOOD FIGHT

From bitter enemies to the best of friends.

I was one of six children of Eileen and Arthur Cooney. My mom ran the house. My father ruled it.

"You'll never amount to anything," he would say, over and over. He didn't just yell. He swung. All of us felt his wrath. He constantly told each one of us, "You're a loser." Obviously, he was the one who had a problem. I started boxing to show him I was no loser. I won two New York Golden Gloves championships, and it felt great to show him I was no loser.

Amateur officials talked to me about going after a spot on the 1976 U.S. Olympic Boxing Team, but the death of my father that year took me in a different direction. I decided to turn pro and signed with two Long Island businessmen, Dennis Rappaport and Mike Jones, who also signed another Long Island fighter, 1976 Olympic gold medalist Howard Davis Jr. Davis turned pro on January 15, 1977. I turned pro exactly one month later. I was 20 years old.

I trained every day at Gleason's Gym, which was then located on W. 30th Street in New York City, just three blocks from Madison Square Garden. I took the Long Island Railroad every morning into the city to work out with my trainer, Victor Valle, at Gleason's. He was a terrific

Holmes-Cooney was a classic heavyweight encounter.

trainer, having been a top lightweight contender in the 1930s. He showed me how to get the most leverage on my punches, and so much more.

In the beginning, I was kept very busy. In 1977, I was 7-0. In 1978, I was 8-0. In 1979, I was 7-0. As my reputation grew, so did my skills.

As early as late 1977, when I had perhaps six victories, my trainer, managers and I talked about the day I would fight a big fight, maybe even a championship. I said "Why not Muhammad Ali? He's not getting any younger."

We liked the way Ali-Cooney sounded and kept a close watch on what "The Greatest" was doing. We didn't have to watch for long, because, in his next fight, on February 15, 1978, Ali lost to Leon Spinks. He announced there would be a rematch later in the year. There went my dream of facing Ali.

As I pushed on in 1978, I watched as Larry Holmes took the WBC title from Ken Norton. Heavyweight bouts – especially the 15th round – don't come any more exciting.

After that fight, I began seeing Holmes much more. I saw him at his fight against Mike Weaver in MSG and I saw him in Las Vegas when he pounded Ali. I flew out quickly to Las Vegas for the fight and turned right around to get back to training camp. My fight against Ron Lyle was three weeks later. Little did I know it, but the Lyle fight would put me just one more fight away from facing Holmes. I got Lyle out of there in 2:49 of the first round. Seven months later, I got Norton out of there in just 54 seconds. On that night, on the night I beat Norton, I feel I could have beaten anybody. I wanted to get right back in the ring. But I didn't. I sat and waited for a call to fight Holmes. And I sat and I sat!

I really wanted to fight; I wanted to stay active. In retrospect, I should have. I was feeling so good about myself. So confident. There's nobody I wouldn't have fought. I remember one of my managers, Mike Jones, telling me how much money I could make. I heard him say, in an interview, "Gerry is going to be the first billionaire boxer." He flat out told me, "We can't risk taking another fight before going into the biggest heavyweight title fight of all time." With him, it was about the money. With me, it was about fighting.

While I sat, Holmes fought. He stayed active. He beat Leon Spinks and Renaldo Snipes on the way to our fight. I was bummed because of the inactivity. The inactivity changed my life. I started drinking. Nobody could tell me anything.

Finally, at the end of 1981, I signed to face Holmes. The fight would take place on March 25, 1982, in Caesars Palace, which was where Holmes had fought several of his biggest fights, including two of his biggest, against Ken Norton and Earnie Shavers. Soon after, however, I injured a shoulder and the fight had to be postponed. More layoff.

The fight was rescheduled for June 11. My shoulder healed. I stopped drinking long enough to get in terrific shape.

I enjoyed training for the fight, but I hated the buildup. It seems all anybody wanted to talk about was the black-white thing. I was the "Great White Hope." Larry hated that, too, but I didn't know it.

We couldn't be near each other in Caesars Palace. We had bodyguards all around us. It was terrible. Finally, it was fight time.

Everything changed for me when Mills Lane brought the two of us to the center of the ring. When he told us to touch gloves, and with his mouthpiece in, Larry said, "Let's have a good fight!" I never expected that from him.

We did have a good fight.

When he knocked me down in the second round, I said to myself, "What are you doing down here? Get up!"

And when I hit him with that low shot in the ninth round, it happened because I was aiming at his body and he pulled my head down with his left arm. I felt so bad.

We continued to fight on even terms, but then my inactivity, his experience and his greatness took over. He stopped me late in the 13th round.

I really learned a lot in that fight, and I learned it from a man who was not just the Heavyweight Champion, but on that night possibly the greatest heavyweight of all time.

Following the fight, I went into a deep, dark hole. I kept hearing my father saying, "You're a loser."

I didn't fight for the remainder of the year and all of 1983. I began drinking heavily. One day, in the spring of 1984, I received a call. It was from Larry Holmes. He told me to get back in the gym and back in the ring. I listened to him, but I didn't stop drinking.

I was hoping to get a rematch, because I know that would have given me the incentive to clean myself up. But a rematch never happened.

What did happen was that Larry and I became friends. We became best friends.

All these years later, we are closer than we ever have been. He and his wife, Diane, go out with me and my wife, Jennifer. I attend dinners where he is honored. He does the same with me. In December, we were honored together by Ring 8 in New York City.

It's hard to believe it's been 40 years since we fought. It feels like yesterday.

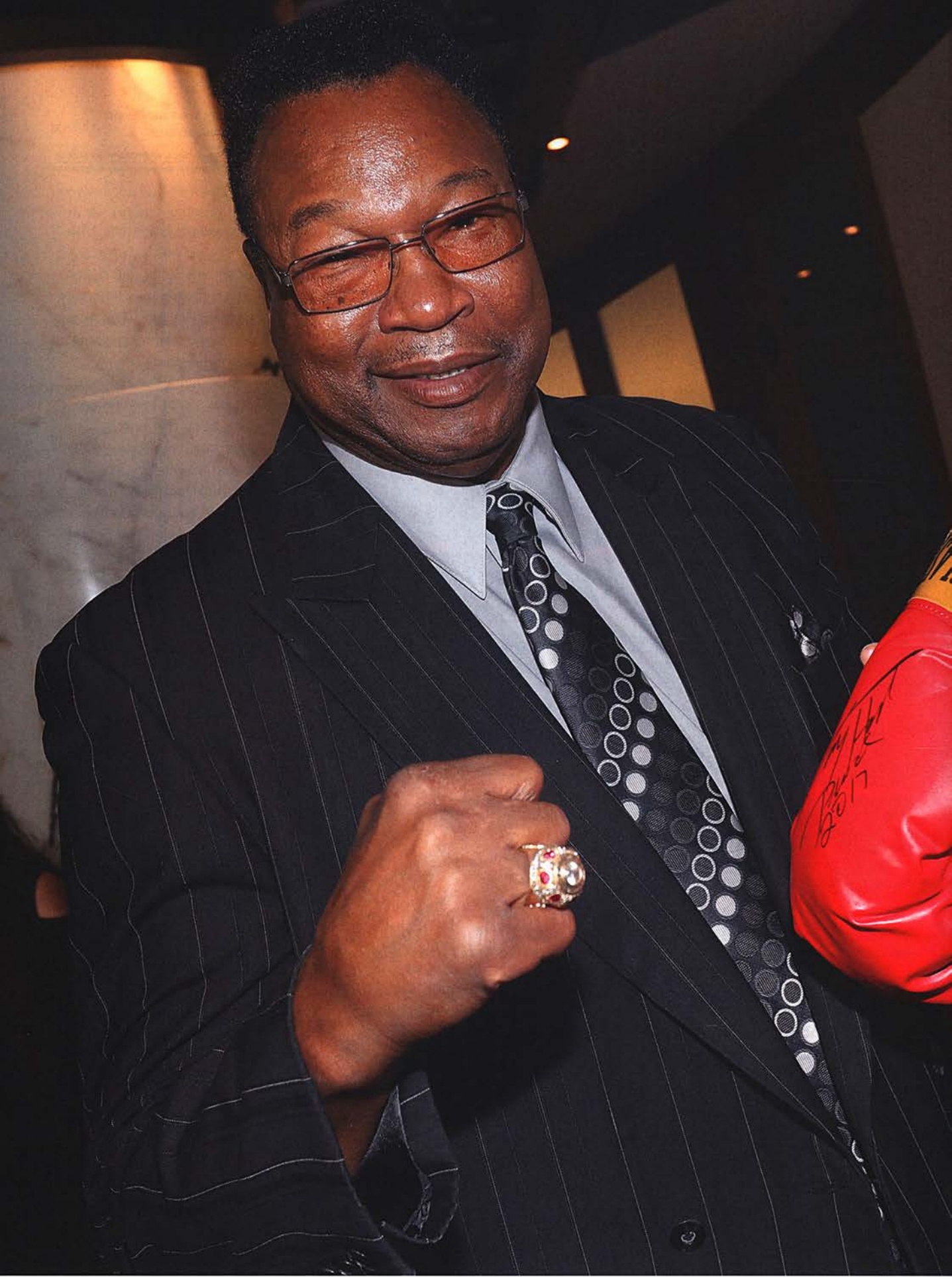
Back then, I didn't like Larry. But then he said, "Let's have a good fight," and we did exactly that.

We were discussing having an exhibition, but COVID-19 got in the way. Now we're happy just remembering that day in Las Vegas 40 years ago.

I love Larry Holmes.

I thank him for all he has done for me and all the good he has done for others.

He is, and always will be, the Heavyweight Champion of the World.



JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

IN PRAISE OF LARRY HOLMES

I'm a big Larry Holmes fan. I met him in 1984 shortly after I began writing about boxing. We chatted briefly and I felt a fan's excitement at being in his presence. Over the years, I've been with him on numerous occasions. He's unpretentious with a certain nobility about him, which is fitting because he's boxing royalty.

Holmes was born in Cuthbert, Georgia, in 1949 and grew up poor in Easton, Pennsylvania. He turned pro in 1973 and, in effect, had two ring careers. In the first, he was heavyweight champion of the world with a 48-0 record and defining victories over Ken Norton, Earnie Shavers and Gerry Cooney sandwiched around the sad dismantling of an aging Muhammad Ali. In the second – with Father Time diminishing his skills – Holmes lost his title by decision to Michael Spinks, came out on the short end of a highly questionable verdict in a rematch and was stopped by Mike Tyson (the only "KO by" in Larry's 75-bout career).

Holmes had a nasty right hand and one of the best jabs in boxing history. Former heavyweight prospect Derek Bryant (who sparred with Larry) said of that jab, "I never saw it coming. I only saw it going back." But there were times when Holmes over-committed on the jab and lifted his chin when he threw it. That left him vulnerable to a well-timed counter right (as Earnie Shavers, Renaldo Snipes and Mike Tyson demonstrated). Each of those men knocked Holmes woozy. And each time, Larry got up.

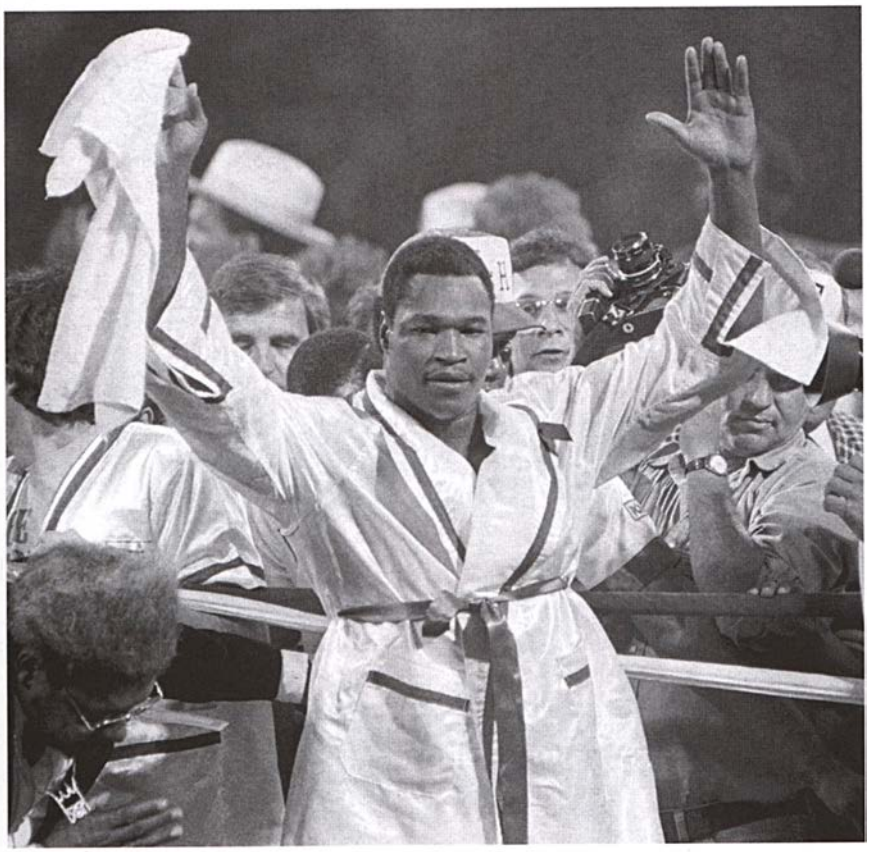
"First you get up," Holmes explained. "Then you worry about whether or not you're all right."

He knocked Shavers and Snipes out.

Most experts put Holmes on the short list of great heavyweight champions of all time. One way or another, he found a way to beat people up.

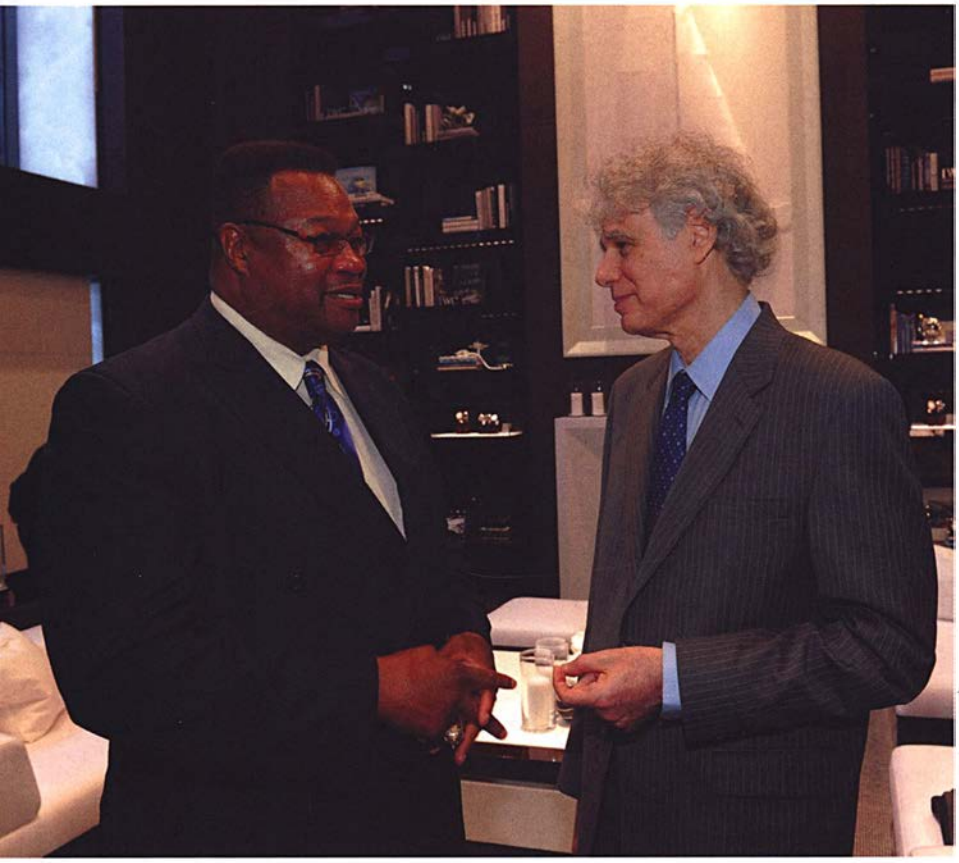
He has also been a good citizen and avoided the pitfalls that some elite athletes fall prey to. There are no newspaper accounts of Holmes being arrested with a gun or Holmes sexually assaulting a woman. Indeed, one night over dinner, Larry told me, "All these athletes and celebrities and other people who force themselves on women; there's no excuse for that. 'No' means no. Anybody can understand that. 'No' is the first word you learn after 'mama' and 'dada.'"

It wasn't all smooth sailing between Larry and myself. In 1990, while conducting research for a



For over 12 years and 48 fights, all Larry Holmes did was celebrate.

PAUL MORIGI (LEFT); BETTMANN



Holmes and Hauser go back almost three decades.

biography of Muhammad Ali, I traveled with Ali to Indonesia, where among other things, we attended a Larry Holmes singing engagement at the Sahid Jaya Hotel in Jakarta. Afterward, I wrote a concert review that appeared in The National and was less than complimentary. Larry telephoned and screamed at me for 45 minutes. Part of me was honored. I told myself, "Larry Holmes, one of the greatest fighters of all time, thinks my writing is important enough to spend 45 minutes on the phone with me." And part of me was worried: "Larry Holmes, one of the greatest fighters of all time, is really pissed."

For almost a year after that, Larry refused to speak to me. Then he decided he would say hello but not shake hands. But beneath his gruff exterior, Larry is a softie at heart. Eventually, he forgave me. Subsequently, we went on a multi-city tour together, hosting a series of cocktail receptions with Angelo Dundee on behalf of Punch Cigars. We've appeared jointly on TV shows. In 1999, Diane Holmes (Larry's wife) invited me to a surprise party to celebrate Larry's 50th birthday at a restaurant that he owned in Easton.

I have fond memories of that night, the most enduring of which is Larry's response when he walked into the restaurant and everyone shouted "Surprise!"

Larry stared in astonishment. Then he went over to the bar and announced that, from that point on, the food was free but people at the party would pay for their own drinks.

Surprise! Like the rest of us, Larry likes money.

"The best thing about being a fighter," he has said, "is making money. Why do football players play football? For the money. Why do basketball players play basketball? For the money. Why do baseball players play baseball? For the money. I didn't fight to entertain people. I fought to get paid. Nobody was allowed to punch me in my face for free."

I asked him once, "Suppose you could travel back in a time machine and fight any heavyweight champion in history. Who would you want to fight?"

"If the money is the same," Larry answered, "tell me which one is the worst fighter, and that's the guy I want to fight."

Larry always speaks his mind.

"I always told the truth as I saw it," he says. "That's the way I am. Some people don't like it, but I call things the way I see them. If I'm wrong, I can say I'm sorry afterwards."

Another time, when I asked Larry to evaluate his place in boxing history, he responded, "To me, I'm better than Ali ever was. I'm better than Joe Louis ever was. In my opinion; my opinion. And I have the right to say that about myself."

If Larry at his best fought Ali at his best, I'd pick Ali. But it wouldn't be a walk in the park. And if they fought 10 times, Larry would win some of them.

Years ago, Larry told me, "None of us is promised tomorrow. If I go 25 more years, that's a blessing. But if I don't, I've done my thing."

He's still doing his thing. And he deserves this special issue of The Ring devoted to his accomplishments. The nicest thing for me about writing this column is that it gives me the chance to tell Larry how much I like him and how much I appreciate what he has meant to boxing.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Broken Dreams: Another Year Inside Boxing *– was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for boxing's highest honor – induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.*

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RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of February 19, 2022

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS BY BRIAN HARTY

Jacobs vs. Ryder

CRUISERWEIGHT: It's been a long road for each since their fight in May 2015, but Ilunga Makabu (No. 2) and Thabiso Mchunu (No. 4) finally found each other again on January 29 in Warren, Ohio, of all places. The Congolese Makabu won the first encounter by late knockout and has fought in eight different countries without a loss since then, holding the WBC title since 2020. South Africa's Mchunu has done less traveling and less winning, but he came close in the rematch – boxing more, firefighting less, winning in the eyes of many but losing two-thirds of the official split decision. The result was incidental, though; most of the post-fight commentary focused on whether Canelo Alvarez should target Makabu for an insanely ambitious shot at a cruiserweight title, with the general opinion being that it wouldn't end well for Makabu. He and Mchunu held their positions in the ratings.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: John Ryder (No. 5) vs. Daniel Jacobs, who was dropped a couple months ago due to inactivity, presented a problem for the Ratings Panel. Ryder won a split decision that many observers felt he didn't deserve, but Jacobs "didn't look like a Top 10 168-pounder." In the absence of clear controversy, the decision was made to follow the official result and leave things as they are for now.

MIDDLEWEIGHT: After four rounds, Liam Williams had already touched the canvas three times against Chris Eubank Jr., and he'd go down again in the 11th before losing a unanimous decision. Eubank moved up from No. 7 to No. 6 and Williams (No. 10 last month) fell out, which created a vacancy at No. 10 for Felix Cash. Cash would hang onto his spot after rising from two knockdowns to outbox Magomed Madiev (unrated) the following week.

Jaime Munguia (No. 4) stalked and eventually caught D'Mitrius Ballard (unrated) with a left hook to the body/left hook upstairs combo in the third round, forcing the wounded American into a corner and dropping him soon afterward. A brief follow-up capped an impressive win for Munguia, who now looks fully formed at middleweight, but his ranking remained the same.

WELTERWEIGHT: Nicknames are a risky thing. Keith Thurman, dubbed "One Time" for the no-sequel-necessary power in his hands, hasn't scored a knockout in almost seven years. He didn't get one in his first fight since losing to Manny Pacquiao in 2019 either, but he's back in the mix nevertheless after notching a unanimous decision over Mario Barrios. And he looked pretty good. The Ratings Panel agreed on No. 6 as the appropriate response, which meant that No. 10-rated Cody Crowley was crowded off the list.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: Subriel Matias surprisingly lost his perfect record to Petros Ananyan (unrated) by a slim decision two years ago, but the Puerto Rican banger worked his way into the ratings with comeback stoppages of Malik Hawkins and Batyrzhan Jukembayev, both 18-0 at the time. In January, Matias (No. 5 last month) got his revenge, stopping the tough but less polished (and this time less active) Ananyan in the ninth round of what was another ab-for-ab battle of attrition. Matias climbed to No. 4 as a result.

Barrios had been rated at No. 6. With his move up to face Thurman, No. 10 was filled by Montana Love.

LIGHTWEIGHT: Zaur Abdullaev (unrated) grabbed his best win so far with a 12th-round stoppage of Jorge Linares (No. 8 at the time), who is facing career uncertainty after losing four of his last seven fights. The former three-division titleholder dropped off the list, thus creating a vacancy at No. 10. There was half-hearted support for Abdullaev, but ultimately the slot was given to William Zepeda, who briefly held the same spot in late 2021 before Gervonta Davis pushed him out in December. Zepeda reentered with a third-round KO of Luis Angel Viedas (unrated).

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: Robson Conceicao (No. 10 last month) bounced back from his loss to Oscar Valdez in September with a wide decision over No. 9-rated Xavier Martinez, confidently taming the younger man at the end of his jab. Conceicao, a gold medalist for Brazil in the 2016 Olympics, moved up to No. 7 while Martinez dropped out, leaving room for Frenchman Samir Ziani at No. 10.

FEATHERWEIGHT: Since winning the WBC title in March 2015, Gary Russell Jr. had defended it just five times, which in a way was great because every year or so we'd get to watch him and say, "Wow, this person has talent!" Every time was like the first time. In that same period, Mark Magsayo had fought 13 times, accounting for more than half of his entire career. Still, the undefeated Filipino was a prohibitive

underdog going into his fight against Russell in January, and his subsequent majority decision victory over the part-time champ was a major upset, the end of boxing's longest-running reign. However, despite solid boxing on Magsayo's part (and a raise from No. 4 to No. 2 in the ratings), the win comes with a major caveat: Russell was essentially fighting with one arm due to a right shoulder injury, and he did well enough to reenter the ratings (he was ejected due to inactivity) at No. 6, with some panelists suggesting as high as No. 3. That doesn't bode well for Magsayo if a two-fisted Russell shows up in a rematch – a fight that Russell is uncharacteristically eager to see happen. The D.C. southpaw's return to the ratings pushed out No. 10-rated Tugstsogt Nyambayar, who'd been Russell's previous opponent back in February 2020.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: Luis Nery entered the list at No. 10, replacing Ryosuke Iwasa, after a somehow-split decision over unrated Carlos Castro, who took a seat courtesy of a straight left in the first round.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Lee McGregor held his position at No. 10 after a 10-round draw with Diego Alberto Ruiz (unrated).

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: Stepping up in both weight class and just plain class – and as a late replacement to boot – Jesse Rodriguez took on former titleholder Carlos Cuadras and emerged with the previously vacant WBC belt around his waist. Rodriguez wasn't joking when he called it a "tough-ass fight" afterward; Cuadras was his usual unyielding self, even after a third-round knockdown, and he made "Bam" earn every point of the unanimous decision. The Texan entered the ratings at No. 6, ousting Pedro Guevara (No. 10), while Cuadras fell from No. 6 to No. 10. (Note: Juan Francisco Estrada has the WBC "franchise" belt, but The Ring really isn't sure what that means, so we're recognizing Rodriguez as the titleholder.)

FLYWEIGHT: No. 7-rated Cristofer Rosales stayed active with a fifth-round disqualification win over fellow Nicaraguan Jerson Ortiz (unrated).

STRAWWEIGHT: IBF titleholder Rene Mark Cuarto and Pedro Taduran, fellow Filipinos rated Nos. 6 and 7 respectively, faced each other for the second time in a row and again finished as the numbers would suggest – on this occasion Cuarto winning via seventh-round technical decision after the pair bonked heads in the sixth.

P4P

1. **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 57-1-2 (39 KOs)
2. **OLEKSANDR USYK** — Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** — U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
4. **NAOYA INOUE** — Japan • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
5. **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
6. **ERROL SPENCE JR.** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
7. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** — Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
8. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** — Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
9. **KAZUTO IOKA** — Japan • 28-2-0 (15 KOs)
10. **TYSON FURY** — U.K. • 31-0-1 (22 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC — U.K. • 31-0-1 (22 KOs)
- 1 **OLEKSANDR USYK** IBF, WBA, WBO — Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 2 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** — U.K. • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 3 **DEONTAY WILDER** — U.S. • 42-2-1 (41 KOs)
- 4 **DILLIAN WHYTE** — U.K. • 28-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 5 **JOSEPH PARKER** — New Zealand • 30-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 6 **ANDY RUIZ JR.** — U.S. • 34-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 7 **LUIS ORTIZ** — Cuba • 33-2-0 (28 KOs)
- 8 **JOE JOYCE** — U.K. • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 9 **FILIP HRGOVIC** — Croatia • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 10 **FRANK SANCHEZ** — Cuba • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF — Latvia • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
- 1 **YUNIEL DORTICOS** — Cuba • 25-2-0 (23 KOs)
- 2 **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC — Congo • 29-2-0 (25 KOs)
- 3 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE** WBO — U.K. • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 4 **THABISO MCHUNU** — S. Africa • 23-6-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **KEVIN LERENA** — S. Africa • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** — Poland • 31-3-0 (19 KOs)
- 7 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** — Russia • 13-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 8 **MICHAL CIESLAK** — Poland • 21-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 9 **MATEUSZ MASTERNAK** — Poland • 46-5-0 (31 KOs)
- 10 **RYAD MERHY** — Belgium • 30-1-0 (25 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC — Russia • 17-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 2 **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA — Russia • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **JOE SMITH JR.** WBO — U.S. • 28-3-0 (22 KOs)
- 4 **MAXIM VLASOV** — Russia • 46-4-0 (26 KOs)
- 5 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** — Mexico • 43-0-0 (29 KOs)
- 6 **CALLUM SMITH** — U.K. • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
- 7 **MARCUS BROWNE** — U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **ANTHONY YARDE** — U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 9 **JOSHUA BUATSI** — U.K. • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 10 **MATHIEU BAUDERLIQUE** — France • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO — Mexico • 57-1-2 (39 KOs)
- 1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** — U.S. • 25-0-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **CALEB PLANT** — U.S. • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** — U.K. • 30-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 4 **ANTHONY DIRRELL** — U.S. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)
- 5 **JOHN RYDER** — U.K. • 31-5-0 (17 KOs)
- 6 **DAVID LEMIEUX** — Canada • 43-4-0 (36 KOs)
- 7 **FEDOR CHUDINOV** — Russia • 25-2-1 (17 KOs)
- 8 **CHRISTIAN MBILLI** — France • 20-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 9 **ZACH PARKER** — U.K. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
- 10 **LERRONE RICHARDS** — U.K. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kazakhstan • 41-1-1 (36 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 39-0-0 (31 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA** WBA
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 32-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **7** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **8** **CARLOS ADAMES**
  Dom. Rep. • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **FELIX CASH**
  U.K. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 34-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **1** **BRIAN CASTANO** WBO
  Argentina • 17-0-2 (12 KOs)
- **2** **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 28-3-3 (16 KOs)
- **4** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **5** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 18-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **7** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (21 KOs)
- **8** **MAGOMED KURBANOV**
  Russia • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **ISRAIL MADRIMOV**
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **10** **LIAM SMITH**
  U.K. • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **YORDENIS UGAS** WBA
  Cuba • 27-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **JARON ENNIS**
  U.S. • 28-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **5** **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 30-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **7** **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
  Lithuania • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **DAVID AVANESYAN**
  Russia • 28-3-1 (16 KOs)
- **9** **RADZHAB BUTAEV**
  Russia • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **CONOR BENN**
  U.K. • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **JOSE RAMIREZ**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 35-2-0 (27 KOs)
- **4** **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
  Puerto Rico • 18-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **5** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 21-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **7** **BATYR AKHMEDOV**
  Russia • 9-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **8** **JOSE PEDRAZA**
  Puerto Rico • 29-3-0 (14 KOs)
- **9** **SANDOR MARTIN**
  Spain • 39-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **10** **MONTANA LOVE**
  U.S. • 17-0-1 (9 KOs)

Ilunga Makabu outpointed Thabiso Mchunu, but both hold their 200-pound positions in the ratings at Nos. 2 and 4, respectively.

Jaime Munguia retained his No. 4 spot at 160 pounds with a third-round demolition of unrated D'Mitrius Ballard.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.** RING, IBF, WBA, WBO
  Australia • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
  U.S. • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **2** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **GERVONTA DAVIS**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **5** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 22-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 32-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **8** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-4-0 (27 KOs)
- **9** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 36-3-1 (25 KOs)
- **10** **WILLIAM ZEPEDA**
  Mexico • 25-0-0 (23 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

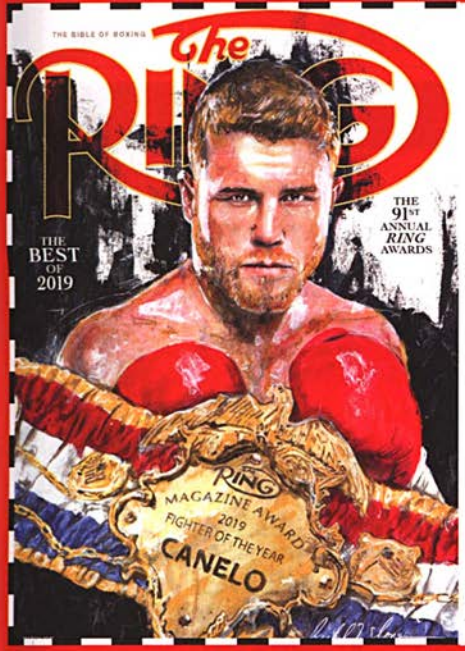
- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** WBO
  U.S. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **MIGUEL BERCHELT**
  Mexico • 38-2-0 (34 KOs)
- **3** **JAMEL HERRING**
  U.S. • 23-3-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 16-0-1 (13 KOs)
- **5** **CHRIS COLBERT**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **ROGER GUTIERREZ**
  Venezuela • 26-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **7** **ROBSON CONCEICAO**
  Brazil • 17-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **8** **KENICHI OGAWA** IBF
  Japan • 26-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **9** **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
  U.S. • 18-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **SAMIR ZIANI**
  France • 33-3-1 (8 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 35-1-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **MARK MAGSAYO** WBC
  Phil. • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 23-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **4** **JOSH WARRINGTON**
  U.K. • 30-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **5** **KIKO MARTINEZ** IBF
  Spain • 43-10-2 (30 KOs)
- **6** **GARY RUSSELL JR.**
  U.S. • 31-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **7** **LEIGH WOOD**
  U.K. • 25-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 28-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **9** **XU CAN**
  China • 18-3-0 (3 KOs)
- **10** **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **STEPHEN FULTON** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 29-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **4** **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 22-1-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **RA'EESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **MARLON TAPALES**
  Phil. • 35-3-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **LUIS NERY**
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (24 KOs)



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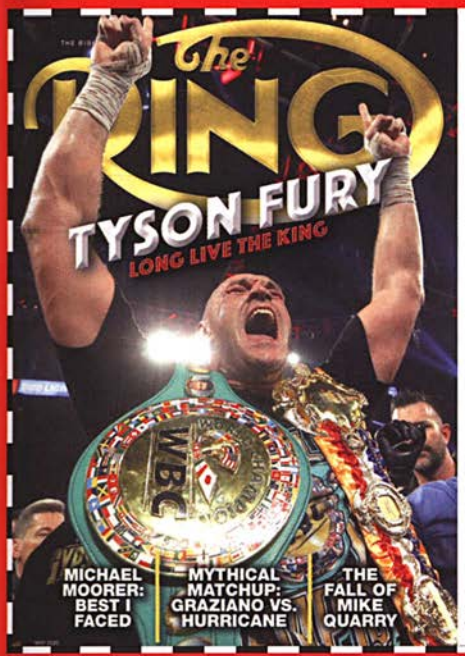

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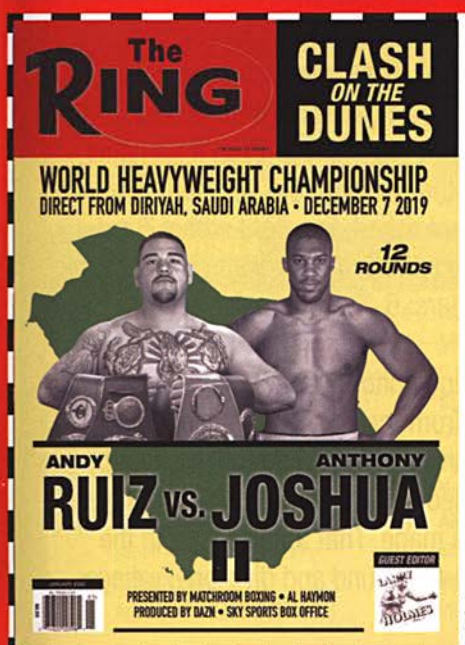

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BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE** WBC
  Phil. • 42-6-0 (28 KOs)
- **2** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
  Phil. • 31-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 19-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **NORDINE OUBAALI**
  France • 17-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 15-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **7** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  Cuba • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
  U.S. • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **9** **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **LEE MCGREGOR**
  U.K. • 11-0-1 (9 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

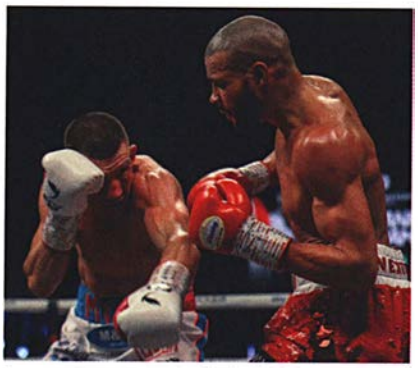
- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBA
  Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 50-5-1 (43 KOs)
- **2** **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
  Nicaragua • 50-3-0 (41 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 28-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
  Phil. • 33-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **5** **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 18-1-2 (8 KOs)
- **6** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 35-5-1 (25 KOs)
- **8** **DONNIE NIETES**
  Phil. • 43-1-6 (23 KOs)
- **9** **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 22-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **CARLOS CUADRAS**
  Mexico • 39-5-1 (27 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 18-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **2** **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **SUNNY EDWARDS** IBF
  U.K. • 17-0-0 (4 KOs)
- **4** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **RICARDO SANDOVAL**
  U.S. • 20-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **MORUTI MTHALANE**
  S. Africa • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **7** **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 32-5-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
  Puerto Rico • 21-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **JACKSON CHAUKE**
  S. Africa • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **10** **RYOTA YAMAUCHI**
  Japan • 8-1-0 (7 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
- **2** **MASAMICHI YABUKI** WBC
  Japan • 13-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **KENSHIRO TERAJI**
  Japan • 18-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **4** **JONATHAN GONZALEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 25-3-1 (14 KOs)
- **5** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **ELWIN SOTO**
  Mexico • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 33-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
  Argentina • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **9** **ESTEBAN BERMUDEZ**
  Mexico • 14-3-2 (10 KOs)
- **10** **DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 12-0-2 (6 KOs)



Chris Eubank Jr. moved up to the No. 6 position at 160 pounds after outpointing Liam Williams, who dropped out.

Keith Thurman returned from an extended layoff to decision Mario Barrios and acquire a No. 6 spot at 147 pounds.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 37-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 55-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **MASATAKA TANIGUCHI** WBO
  Japan • 15-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **WILFREDO MENDEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **RENE MARK CUARTO** IBF
  Phil. • 20-2-2 (11 KOs)
- **7** **PEDRO TADURAN**
  Phil. • 14-4-1 (11 KOs)
- **8** **ERICK ROSA**
  Dom. Rep. • 5-0-0 (1 KO)
- **9** **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 21-5-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **GINJIRO SHIGEOKA**
  Japan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of February 19, 2022

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 20-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 42-1-1 (30 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 11-2-0 (4 KOs)

5 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)

6 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)

7 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 16-0-0 (5 KOs)

8 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)

9 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)

10 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-1-1 (11 KOs)
4 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 27-1-0 (13 KOs)
5 **SHADASIA GREEN**
U.S. • 9-0-0 (8 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 27-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-1-1 (11 KOs)
4 **FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 12-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **RAQUEL MILLER**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (4 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE**
Canada • 18-1-0 (1 KO)
2 **PATRICIA BERGHULT** WBC
Sweden • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
3 **HANNAH RANKIN** WBA
U.K. • 11-5-0 (2 KOs)
4 **NATASHA JONAS** WBO
U.K. • 11-2-1 (8 KOs)
5 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **JESSICA MCCASKILL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 11-2-0 (4 KOs)
1 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 44-13-5 (11 KOs)
3 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 22-6-0 (0 KOs)
4 **LOLITA MUZEYA**
Zambia • 16-1-0 (8 KOs)
5 **EWA PIATKOWSKA**
Poland • 16-1-0 (4 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **CHANTELLE CAMERON** RING, IBF, WBC
U.K. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-5-0 (10 KOs)
2 **KALI REIS** WBA, WBO
U.S. • 19-7-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MARY MCGEE**
U.S. • 27-4-0 (15 KOs)
4 **ANAHI SANCHEZ**
Argentina • 20-5-0 (12 KOs)
5 **JESSICA CAMARA**
Canada • 8-3-0 (0 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
Ireland • 20-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)
2 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 42-1-1 (30 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 9-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 14-2-0 (5 KOs)
5 **YANINA LESCANO**
Argentina • 10-1-0 (2 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **MIKAELA MAYER** RING, IBF, WBO
U.S. • 16-0-0 (5 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)
2 **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** WBC
U.S. • 11-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE**
France • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
5 **TERRI HARPER**
U.K. • 11-1-1 (6 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 42-1-1 (30 KOs)
2 **ERIKA CRUZ HERNANDEZ** WBA
Mexico • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 41-11-2 (19 KOs)
5 **ELINA TISSEN**
Germany • 25-2-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 39-4-4 (16 KOs)
2 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 17-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE**
France • 15-0-0 (1 KO)
4 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
Mexico • 18-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-11-4 (19 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 17-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 22-3-1 (4 KOs)
3 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-11-4 (19 KOs)
4 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 53-4-2 (30 KOs)
5 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 16-5-1 (0 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 33-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 20-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 32-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 24-4-1 (4 KOs)
5 **ADELAIDA RUIZ**
U.S. • 10-0-1 (5 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 11-1-0 (1 KOs) WBC
2 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 19-2-1 (7 KOs)
3 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 30-3-2 (10 KOs)
4 **IBETH ZAMORA**
Mexico • 32-7-0 (12 KOs)
5 **JESSICA NERY PLATA**
Mexico • 27-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

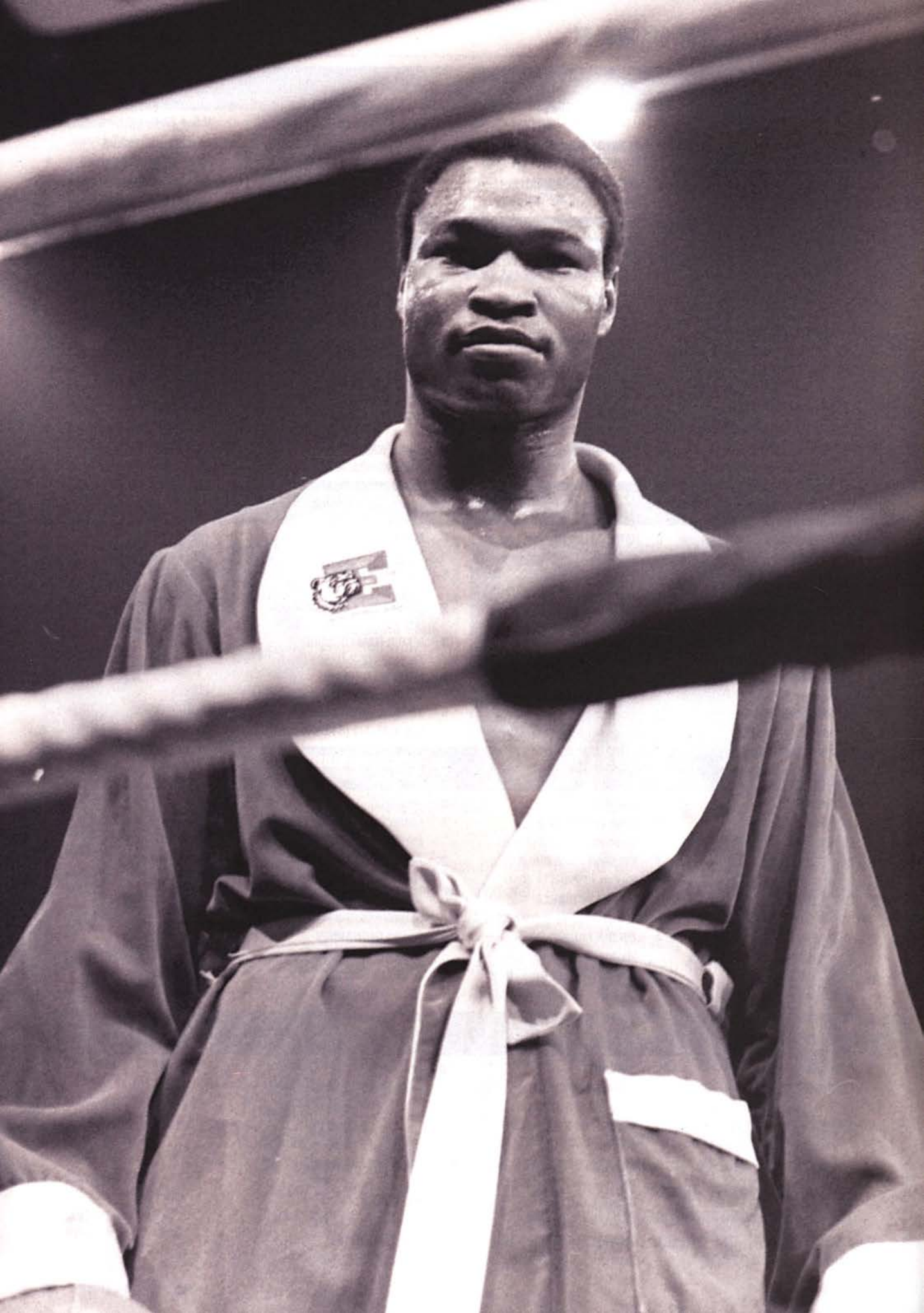
C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBO
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 15-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 14-0-0 (2 KOs)
4 **TSUNAMI TENKAI**
Japan • 28-13-1 (16 KOs)
5 **YESICA BOPP**
Argentina • 37-2-0 (17 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBA
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 11-0-1 (3 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 23-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ANABEL ORTIZ**
Mexico • 31-5-0 (4 KOs)
5 **THI THU NHI NGUYEN** WBO
Vietnam • 5-0-0 (1 KO)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 17-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 18-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
4 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 4-0-1 (1 KO)
5 **YENIFER LEON**
Venezuela • 13-4-0 (9 KOs)



OVERWORKED AND UNDERPAID ASSASSIN

OVERSHADOWED AND OFTEN BURIED ON THE UNDERCARDS OF STARS LIKE **ALI** AND **FOREMAN, HOLMES** GRADUALLY FOUGHT HIS WAY INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

By Tom Gray

Above: A sparse crowd in Cleveland looks on as Holmes (right) battles Kevin Isaac in 1973.

"The Easton Assassin" lurked in the shadows for a very long time.

There was no podium moment in the amateurs. There was no "Star-Spangled Banner" or ticker tape parade through his home city. There was no rich syndicate looking to invest in his professional career. There was no TV network knocking down the door to broadcast his fights. There were no advertising deals or endorsements.

Unlike Floyd Patterson, Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and George Foreman – legendary heavyweight champions who had claimed Olympic gold for the United States – Holmes rose through the ranks in relative obscurity. During the embryonic stages of his career, the future Hall of Famer was overworked and underpaid, barely able to cover the cost of fuel required to get him from one seedy venue to the next.

"I was struggling because I didn't have no money," Holmes told me in a recent interview for The Ring. "I'd have a fight in Scranton [Pennsylvania] and make 150 [or] 200 dollars. It's a case of take it or don't take it. If you don't take it you don't fight, so I took it. I'd put gas in my car, drive up there, and it was neat for me because I was fighting and winning. Back then, people told me that I was going to end up punchy or crazy. People would tell me I was going to get the shit beat out of me. All these years later, do I sound punchy?"

The question is rhetorical. Holmes knows that he doesn't sound punchy.

Holmes dispatched Charlie Green in one round in Richfield, Ohio in 1975.

After 29 years in professional boxing (March 1973 to July 2002), he'd posted a final career mark of 69-6 (44 KOs), with 21 of those victories coming in world title fights, and exited the sport in very good health. He made a fortune, achieved things beyond his wildest dreams. But what convinced him to ignore all those early detractors and stay the course?

"I was training in New York and met guys by the name of Wendall Bailey, Wendell Newton, Jasper Evans and Randy Neumann," recalled Holmes. "I boxed those guys – they were pro long before I started – and I was doing good with them.

"I kept going and I thought my style worked well for me. I wasn't thinking about the championship back then. It was all about getting in shape. But pretty soon I realized that I had some talent. I won the Golden Gloves, then I fought Duane Bobick [in an Olympic box-off] and he beat me. But I didn't stop and I turned pro."

The Bobick setback hurt Holmes' reputation badly. The bout was broadcast live on national TV (ABC); Holmes had been disqualified for holding and subsequently lost out on an opportunity to represent the U.S. at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Some labeled him "a quitter," but there were others who knew better.

Holmes had been introduced to the sport in his home city of Easton by former pro middleweight Ernie Butler, who worked as a guard in a county jail and taught boxing in his spare time. Butler saw something in the youngster and spent a lot of time with him. He taught Holmes the basics, nurtured him as an amateur, then introduced him to the most famous fighter in the world.

Muhammad Ali was training for an upcoming exhibition in nearby Reading, Pennsylvania, and after observing the speed of Holmes' fists, "The Greatest" hired him as a sparring partner. Being relatively close to the Philadelphia area, Holmes would also make his way to 2917 N. Broad Street to spar then-heavyweight champion "Smokin'" Joe Frazier.

While Holmes was earning pennies as a professional fighter ($800 for eight fights in one year, according to

the ex-champ), the education he was receiving courtesy of the glamour division's top two professors was invaluable. Who the hell needs Olympic schooling when you're at university with Ali and Frazier? Holmes was also growing physically. He'd been barely 190 pounds for Bobick and was now comfortably over 200 pounds as a heavyweight prospect.

Early on, promoter Don King had entered into a 50-50 managerial partnership with Butler, but quickly sought a complete takeover when Holmes showed some promise. In typical King fashion, he succeeded in pushing Butler out and quickly enlisted the services of volatile coach Richie Giachetti, who remained with Holmes for the majority of his championship career and beyond. The pair enjoyed incredible success, but there were periods when Eddie Futch and Ray Arcel – often accompanied by Freddie Brown – took the reins.

"I never split from Richie," interrupted Holmes in a bid to clear the air. "I never left Richie. I was with Eddie [Futch] because that's what Don King wanted, but I never left Richie.

"Richie shows you how to fight. His style will work for you if you want to learn. If you listen to him, he'll tell you: Do this, do that, stay away from this, stay away from that – normal shit. But I did it and he stuck with me. And when I started making some money, he got a percentage. He took 25 percent, but he was a good guy. He was a good guy until the day he died."

Despite his obvious respect for Giachetti, Holmes has always been quick to show his appreciation for the old school legends who helped him forge a very special legacy. "Arcel, Brown and Futch, in my opinion, were the best boxing trainers ever," Holmes told me in 2011. "They had over 100 years of boxing experience combined. When you have guys like that in your corner, how can you lose? These guys taught you how to fight, whereas today there are trainers who are barely out of high school, learning from books. You don't learn anything that way. You need to draw on real experiences, and it's too bad that fighters today don't have that."

By March 1975, Ali was in his second reign as heavyweight champion and preparing for a title defense against Chuck Wepner. It would mark the last time that Holmes would serve as sparring partner for his friend and mentor. With training complete, he bid the champion farewell and scored a first-round knockout of journeyman Charley Green on the Ali-Wepner undercard. Ali halted Wepner in the 15th and final round.

Later that year, Ali ventured to Manila for a rubber match with archrival Frazier. What became arguably the finest heavyweight championship fight of all time, "The Thrilla in Manila," was supported by Holmes' first significant step up in class. He was matched with the 34-5 Rodney Bobick, younger brother of his Olympic box-off conqueror, and "The Easton Assassin" rose to the occasion with an impressive sixth-round stoppage.

"I had a good time in Manila," recalled Holmes. "It was my first time going that far away on an airplane. It was a good time for me, but nobody thought I was going to win. Rodney Bobick was a better fighter than his brother; he could box and he could fight. But I liked the way he was boxing, because I could counter whatever he was doing. He'd jab and I'd put a right hand over the jab.

"I was ringside for Ali-Frazier 3. I was right there. Everything was 'Ali! Ali! Ali!' And I was like everybody else: 'Ali! Ali! Ali!' (laughs) Ali was more of a friend to me than Joe Frazier. But Ali did say to me, 'What does Joe do when you do this? What does Joe do when you do that?' I'm like, 'Man, I can't tell you that!'"

After disposing of Bobick, Holmes knocked out his next four opponents before taking another step up in class. Roy Williams was 238 pounds, 6-foot-5 and had a record of 23-4 (18 KOs). He was an authentic knockout artist from Philadelphia who Holmes knew only too well.

Williams had also served as a sparring partner for Ali in the early '70s. But while Holmes had grown to love and respect his idol, Williams had very little time for the self-styled GOAT, and that showed every time they shared a ring together.

"Ali didn't want to box him," revealed Holmes. "Ali wanted somebody to take it easy, but Roy said, 'No, I'm fighting! I'm gonna beat your ass! I'm gonna kick your ass!' Every time he got in the ring with Ali, he'd try and beat him up. They didn't want that kind of fight with Roy, because it was like that every day. Ali would maybe use Roy for one round, two at the most.

"Roy was a big puncher and he didn't like Ali. He was supposed to fight [on the Foreman-Ali undercard], and something happened. Roy didn't get to fight. Later, he wanted Ali to pay him the money he'd lost. Roy was telling me, 'I'm gonna kill him! I'm gonna knock his ass out!'"

In what was the closest fight of his pre-championship career, Holmes scored a 10-round unanimous decision over Williams in Landover, Maryland, on April 30, 1976. The main event that night saw Jimmy Young lose a narrow – many say controversial – decision to Ali. The great champion was now in decline and Holmes was improving with each and every fight.

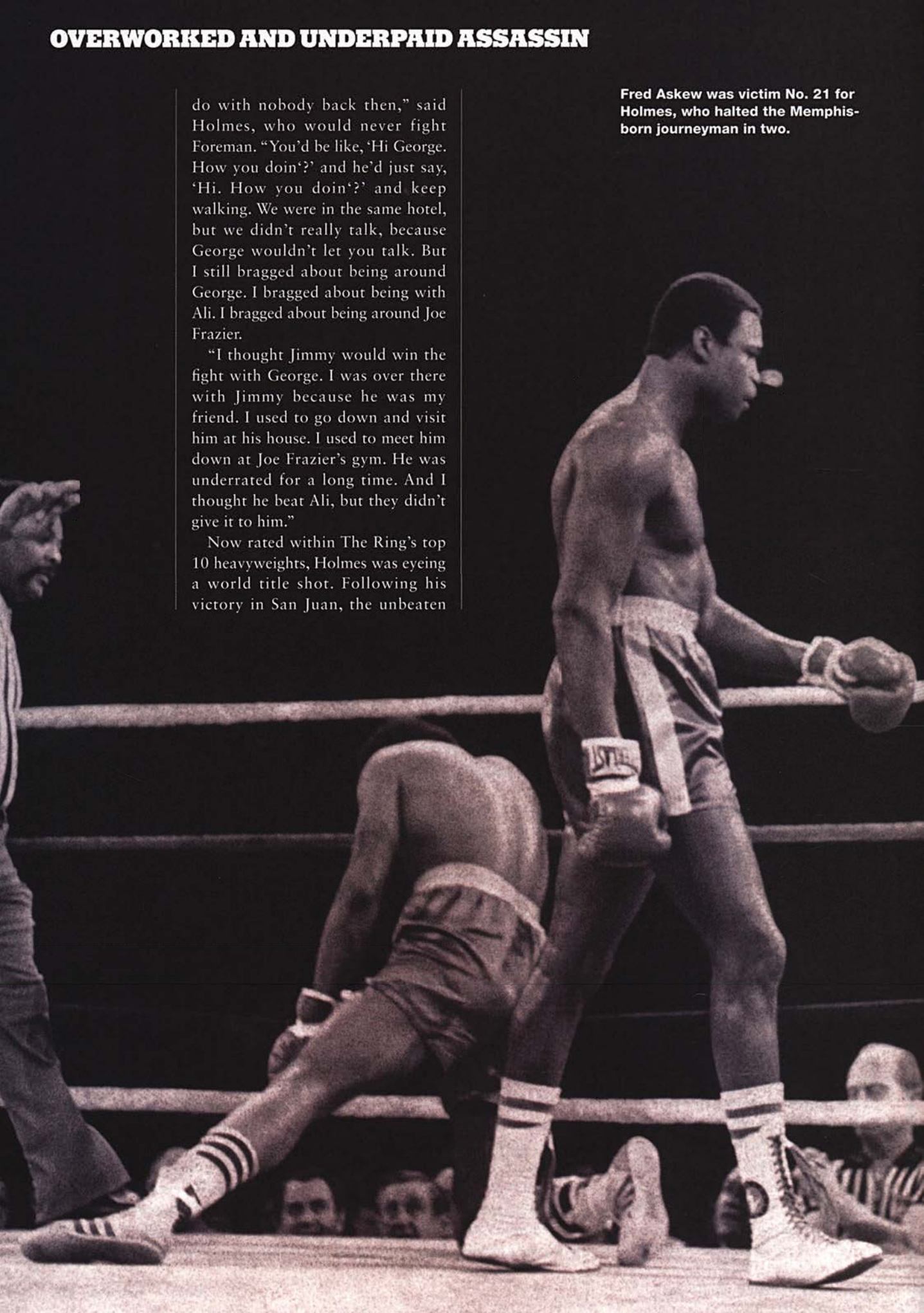
Young was also a serious player in the heavyweight division at that point. Seven months after pushing Ali to the limit, he outpointed powerful slugger Ron Lyle for a second time. His reward was a shot at former champion George Foreman in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on March 17, 1977. Holmes scored a fifth-round stoppage of Horace Robinson on the undercard and Young upset Foreman, sending the soon-to-be preacher into a decade-long retirement.

"George didn't have nothing to

do with nobody back then," said Holmes, who would never fight Foreman. "You'd be like, 'Hi George. How you doin'?' and he'd just say, 'Hi. How you doin'?' and keep walking. We were in the same hotel, but we didn't really talk, because George wouldn't let you talk. But I still bragged about being around George. I bragged about being with Ali. I bragged about being around Joe Frazier.

"I thought Jimmy would win the fight with George. I was over there with Jimmy because he was my friend. I used to go down and visit him at his house. I used to meet him down at Joe Frazier's gym. He was underrated for a long time. And I thought he beat Ali, but they didn't give it to him."

Now rated within The Ring's top 10 heavyweights, Holmes was eyeing a world title shot. Following his victory in San Juan, the unbeaten



Fred Askew was victim No. 21 for Holmes, who halted the Memphis-born journeyman in two.

When promoter Don King saw potential in Holmes, he was all in.

contender scored consecutive knockout wins over Fred Houpe and Ibar Arrington in Las Vegas before being matched with another familiar face in a WBC heavyweight title eliminator.

During his days as a sparring partner, Holmes had accepted good money to work with Earnie Shavers, who was then world-rated. With 52 KOs in 54 wins, against six losses and one draw, Shavers had the highest knockout ratio among the division's top contenders. Holmes had watched his former employer knock sparring partners out cold with 20-ounce gloves on.

However, since that time, Holmes was the one who had done all the improving. There were no secrets with Shavers and, at this point, all he had was a puncher's chance against a brilliant boxer-mover who was closing in on his prime. The pair met at the Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion on March 25, 1978.

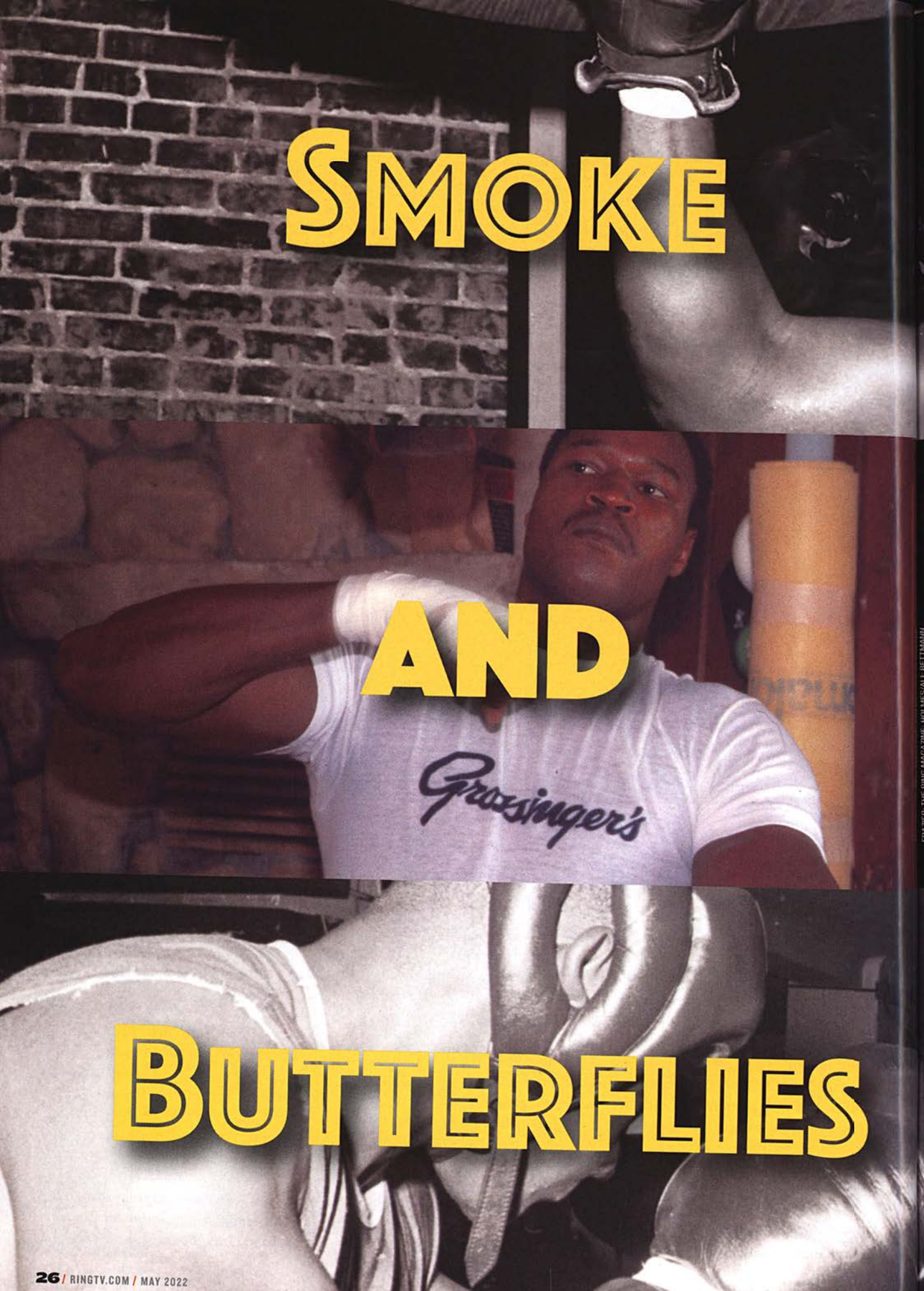
"I knew I could beat Earnie," Holmes told me in 2020. "I knew he'd run out of stamina after four or five rounds, so I just had to box him. It was my first 12-rounder. I fought at my own pace and I didn't want to get myself involved in a war. You don't fight against a guy like that. Box, box, box. I gotta win, so I outboxed him, because he was strong and he was always ready to go.

"I'd sparred Earnie and knew how big a puncher he was. He was another guy that I didn't wanna fight, but I had to fight him if I wanted a title shot. For four or five rounds against Earnie, you're in trouble, so you need to box and stay away from him. That's the only way to win."

With Shavers essentially shut out over 12 rounds, Holmes was now in position to fight for the championship. He'd sparred Ali and Frazier. He'd been around George Foreman. The only elite-level heavyweight of the time that Holmes was yet to encounter was Ken Norton.

Tom Gray is managing editor for The Ring. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

SMOKE AND BUTTERFLIES



FRAZIER: THE RING MAGAZINE; HOLMES/ALI: BETTMANN

HOLMES FOUND FRIENDSHIP AND VALUABLE EXPERIENCE AS A SPARRING PARTNER FOR BOTH MUHAMMAD ALI AND JOE FRAZIER

By Thomas Gerbasi

On February 25, 1964, Muhammad Ali stopped Sonny Liston to become the heavyweight champion of the world.

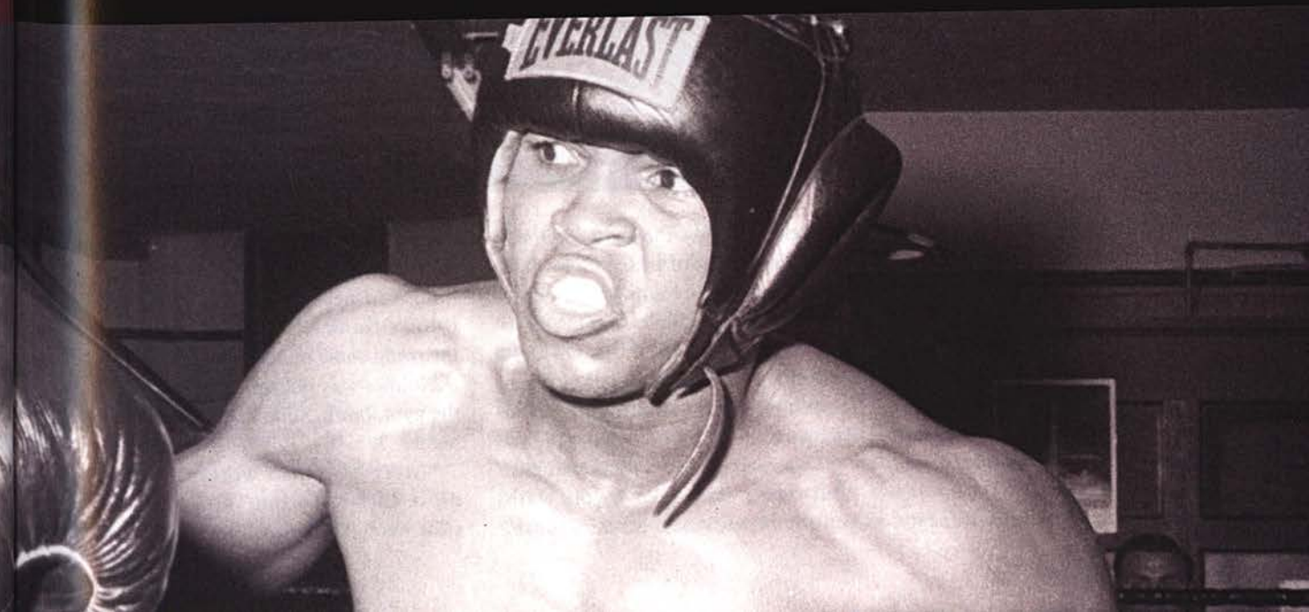
A teenage Larry Holmes had other things on his mind.

"When I was 14 years old, I wasn't thinking about boxing," said Holmes. "I was thinking about working and making some money, trying to take care of my family."

Little did the future hall of famer know what impact "The Greatest" and his fiercest rival, Joe Frazier, would later have on his life. But when Ali, then Cassius Clay, shook up the world, Holmes was a year removed from dropping out of school in order to help his mother, Flossie, and his 10 siblings make ends meet.

Working everywhere from a car wash to fur, steel and rug factories, Holmes' work ethic was second to none, something that was noticed by ex-boxer Ernie Butler, who took him under his wing at St. Anthony's Youth Center in Easton, Pennsylvania, and taught him to box. Eventually, Butler got Holmes some amateur bouts, and in 1971, he introduced him to a man who had gone through a lot since that seminal performance in Miami Beach.

Ali, who'd come up short in his quest to regain the heavyweight crown in his third fight after a three-year exile earlier that year, was on the comeback trail



following the "Fight of the Century" with Frazier, and he was looking for someone to get some rounds in with him for a charity exhibition to support the PAL in Reading, Pennsylvania, where he was training at the time.

"I'm a young boxer and I'd like to work with you," said Holmes to Ali.

"Boy, don't you know who I am?"

"Yeah, I know. That's why I'm here."

"I need somebody to work with for an exhibition."

"OK, I can do it."

"Can you fight?"

"Yeah, man, I can fight."

Either impressed by the 21-year-old's confidence or desperate to have someone to spar with for the crowd showing up for the exhibition, Ali brought Holmes on board and the two traded blows for the first time.

It was the beginning of a relationship that lasted until Ali passed away at the age of 74 on June 3, 2016.

"I was there to the day he died," said Holmes. "I always went and seen Ali at the gym, even when he wasn't fighting. I miss him."

In December of 2002, Ali and Holmes made a trip to Gallagher's Steakhouse in New York City to promote the release of a book featuring Ali. It was 22 years after their bout in Las Vegas and even longer from the first time they met in 1971, but watching the two interact made it clear that they were not just work colleagues and then rivals. They were friends. But Ali was still a mentor to Holmes, as evidenced when Holmes was asked about his former boss' activism and willingness to risk it all for his beliefs, something not many pro athletes at the time were willing to do.

"It was part of his attraction," said Holmes. "But he never knew if someone was going to shoot him. These days, the best thing you can do is shut up. That's what their managers tell them: Don't take no positions."

Ali interjected.

"They can't do it because I did it. You've got to have the heart to do it."

Ali had plenty of heart, more than most. But so did Holmes, who was a father of two daughters and trying to earn a spot on the 1972 U.S. Olympic team when he dusted himself off from the exhibition and boldly approached Ali again.

"I was starstruck," Holmes laughs. "But then I said, 'Can I work with you tomorrow?' and he said, 'Yeah, come on up here.' He didn't pay me or anything, but he let me work with him. And he didn't try to hurt me. I don't think. (laughs) But he was throwing some punches."

Holmes was put up in a hotel near the gym, but he didn't stay there that night.

"After I finished working out, I drove back to Easton," said Holmes, who made the hour-long commute each day until Ali ultimately built his training camp in Deer Lake, Pennsylvania.

"When I got with him and went to his camp in Deer Lake, he was my man," laughed Holmes. "He couldn't do nothing wrong."

Ali completed the Deer Lake Training Camp in 1972, the year Holmes lost to Duane Bobick in an Olympic box-off. That dream shattered, Holmes ended his amateur career with a 19-3 record and turned pro in March of 1973, when he decisioned Rodell Dupree for the grand sum of $63.

Needless to say, money was tight for the young father, but he was able to supplement his fight night wages with paychecks from Ali and another pretty fair heavyweight in Frazier, who was approached in a similar fashion by Holmes when Ali was traveling and not at Deer Lake.

"No one ever called me," said Holmes. "Joe Frazier never called me; Ali never called me. I just went and told them. I walked into the gym where Joe Frazier was, and I walked into the gym at Muhammad Ali's camp. One time, Ali was getting ready to fight and he went away. And when he went away, I got in my car and drove down to Philly, and I told Joe, 'I'm a boxer.'"

"OK, let's go," said Frazier. "Get ready."

"So I got ready and we boxed," recalled Holmes. "Joe got to liking me and we kept on boxing with Jimmy Young and guys like that. I hung in there with Joe Frazier."

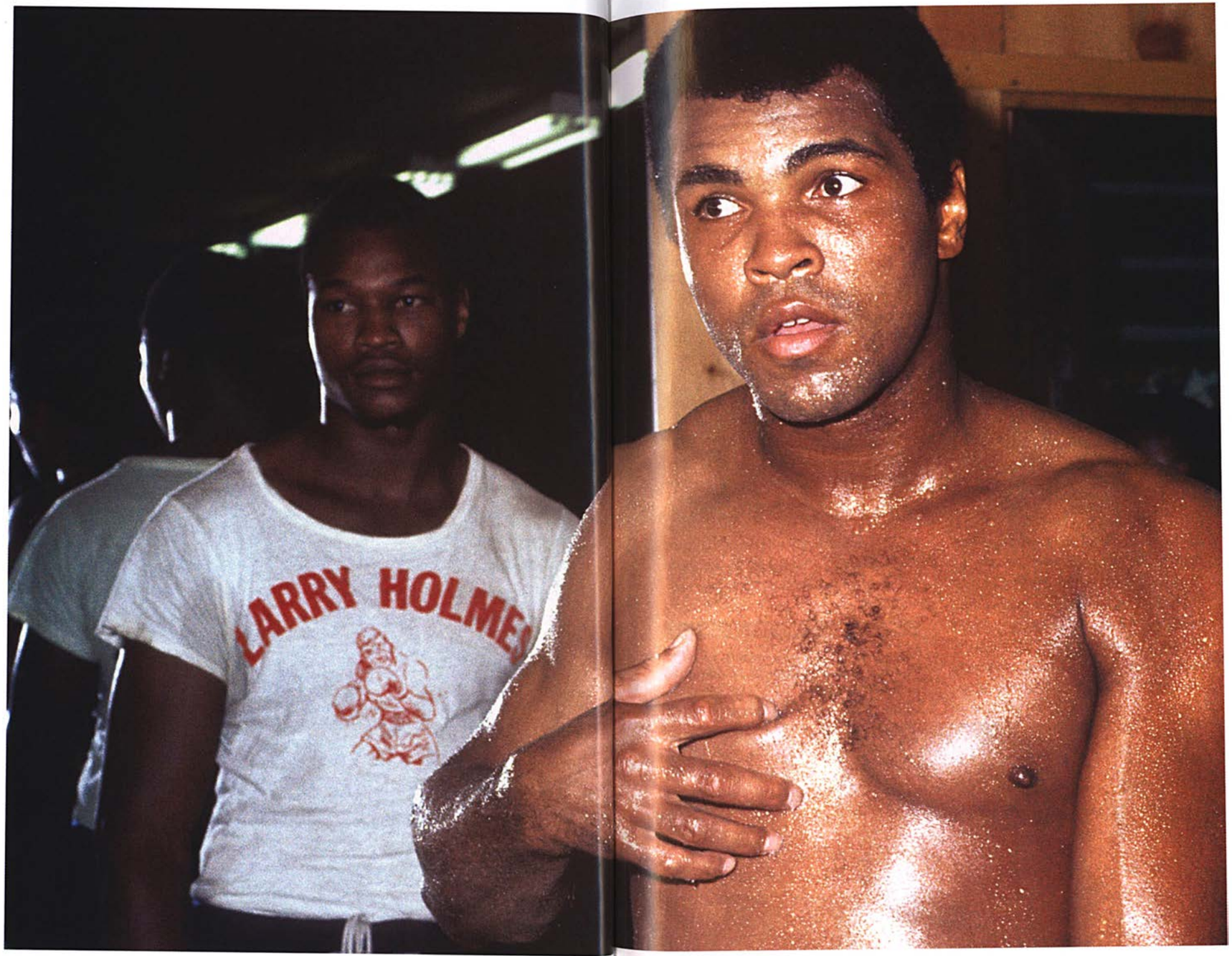
Considering Frazier's ferocious left hooks and relentless pressure, that's saying a lot, but Holmes did tell me in 2020 for an interview with Boxing News magazine that Frazier did catch up to him once.

"He used to call me 'The Roadrunner,'" said Holmes. "I was not gonna stay in there and let Joe bang me up in the ribs and everything. But he caught me one time. One time. He broke my ribs, but I said I ain't quitting. I'm working with Joe Frazier. I'm not gonna quit."

Holmes never caught up to the Philly legend in the ring, but as the two joked later, the score is settled.

"Yeah, he got me, but I always told him I got even with him," recalled Holmes. "Joe said, 'What do you mean, Larry?' 'I knocked out Marvis.'"

Holmes laughs, referring to his 1983 stoppage of Frazier's son in defense of the Ring title. There were moments of levity between Holmes and his two bosses, but given the animosity between Ali and Frazier at that time, you would imagine that



A young Holmes is on sparring duty with Ali at the Deer Lake training camp in 1974.

Holmes had to do some fast talking when it was revealed that he was working with both of them. He says that wasn't the case.

"They didn't try to switch me in and out," said Holmes. "There was none of that 'If you want me, you stay with me.' None of that. Those guys were professionals. I told Joe I was working with Ali, too, and he didn't care. Joe wanted the work and to get in shape. That's all he did. I told Ali I was working with Joe, and he said, 'What did you do? Did you hit him? Can he take a punch?' It wasn't serious about nothing with those two guys."

As for the actual work, the styles of Ali and Frazier couldn't have been more different, making it a master class in the sweet science every time Holmes met up with them.

"Ali came out of his dressing room and got in the ring and he did what he did – dance around the ring, and it was shadowboxing," said Holmes. "Joe didn't do that. He would shake his hands out and then he'd try to knock you out. That was the way Joe boxed."

Holmes' Ali-esque style fit perfectly for Frazier, who would go on to two more bouts with Ali in 1974 and 1975.

"I boxed like Ali – move around the ring, circle around – and Joe liked that," said Holmes, who fought on the Thrilla in Manila undercard in 1975, halting the brother of Duane Bobick, Rodney, in six rounds. "That's the kind of work he wanted and that's what I gave him."

As for Ali, it wasn't a surprise that while he had no problem with Holmes picking up a few extra bucks working with Frazier, he had to get in a few jabs – literally and figuratively.

"Ali would get you in the ring sometimes and talk to you," said Holmes. "He'd go, 'You're messing with Joe Frazier. Take that.' And he would hit me, but I was OK. I was a big boy. (laughs) I took whatever he gave me."

That's no surprise; for as pivotal a role as Holmes played in Ali's preparation, "The Greatest" was even more important to Holmes, in and out of the ring. So he took what he had to while in camp or traveling around the globe with the rest of the team. At first, it was about the money and developing his craft. Later, it became so much more.

"I wasn't thinking about marketing or anything," said Holmes, who likely would have been able to parlay a gig as Muhammad Ali's sparring partner into plenty of lucrative opportunities if the two were fighting in today's world. "I was thinking about working with him and getting a few dollars every week, and that's it. And I was there for him. Whatever he wanted or needed me to do. I'd help Lana [Shabazz] in the kitchen. I went to the store. I did whatever he asked me to do."

And though Ali didn't sit Holmes down and give advice about navigating the shark-filled waters of the boxing business, his example was much stronger than any words would be. Case in point: When Holmes started working with Ali on a regular basis, he would drive home to Easton each day and tell anybody who would listen that he was working with the most famous athlete in the world.

They weren't buying it.

"They didn't believe me," said Holmes. "Nobody cared. 'Oh yeah, OK, all right.' Then I took a couple guys up there with me while I was

A 38-year-old Ali was unable to bluff Holmes ahead of their ill-fated bout in October 1980.

Frazier, Holmes and Norton with actress Barbara McNair in Los Angeles.

training, and they watched me fight Ali. Then they started believing me even though I was just an amateur kid."

Those friends knew the truth, but the rest of the city didn't. Holmes revealed this to his boss and Ali told him to get ready. They were going to Easton.

"It was like the president walking down the street," Holmes laughs. "You had a whole bunch of people out there. Ali wasn't as famous as he would be now, but he was famous, and people recognized him and knew who he was. And they knew I was boxing with him because I made sure everybody knew it, and it was a great time."

Holmes never forgot that act of kindness, and it showed just who Ali was.

"When we traveled, people stopped and blew their horns," Holmes told me in 2002. "It was mind-boggling, but I never saw him turn down an autograph. Michael Jordan doesn't have the charisma Ali has. He won't deal with you like Ali would. If Ali saw a little kid on the side of the road, he would stop, talk with him and take a picture. Jordan would probably go by and step on the gas."

That's a hard act to follow for anyone, especially for Holmes, who liked to let his fists do the talking for him. And as he rose up the heavyweight ranks on his own and ultimately won the title in a classic with Ken Norton in 1978, he did it his way, which didn't sit right with some expecting the second coming of Ali.

"The press weren't as kind as they are now," Holmes said. "They said I was arrogant. They said something negative, I said something negative back. I didn't know how to accept that. It took a lot of maturity. But now they know I'm not as bad as some of the press said I was."

What they found out was that he wasn't the next Muhammad Ali, but the first Larry Holmes. That still wasn't enough for those who cried when Holmes stopped his former boss in their 1980 bout.

"Are you Larry Holmes?" asked one woman who approached the champ on the street after the Ali bout.

"Yes."

"I hate you."

"Why?"

"You beat Muhammad."

Some would never come around, but most did, appreciating Holmes for what he did during a career that saw him compile a 69-6 (44 KOs) record while successfully defending his world heavyweight titles 20 times. That appreciation and respect continues for the 72-year-old, who was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2008 but unfortunately doesn't have his friends Muhammad and Joe around to enjoy these days with him.

"Ali was a good guy," said Holmes in 2020. "He let me hang in the gym more than anybody, I think. He treated me well every day until the day he died. He liked me. And I think about Joe a lot. Joe was my man. I learned from both of them."

When sitting down for this interview in early February, Holmes had just watched a documentary on his buddies the night before, and it brought back memories, and also some new revelations.

"I didn't realize how much they didn't like each other, because I worked with both of them," he said. "Ali was always the man. And Joe was the man when I worked with him. They let me do what I had to do. All they wanted me to do was be there to box when they called me. That's what they did."

So he didn't favor one or the other in their two fights once he started working with them?

"Of course, I wanted Muhammad Ali to win, but that's it," Holmes deadpans before throwing the punchline like one of his jackhammer jabs. "I didn't tell Joe that."

TRIAL BY FIREFIGHT

NOT EVEN AN INJURED ARM WOULD PREVENT HOLMES FROM SEIZING HIS DESTINY – AND THE WBC TITLE – DURING AN EPIC SHOWDOWN WITH KEN NORTON

By **Jerry Izenberg**

When Norton's first shot at the heavyweight championship didn't even last two full rounds. George Foreman demolished him. Nobody remembered it. The question Norton was asked the most back then was, "Aren't you the guy who broke Ali's jaw after he lost to Joe Frazier?"

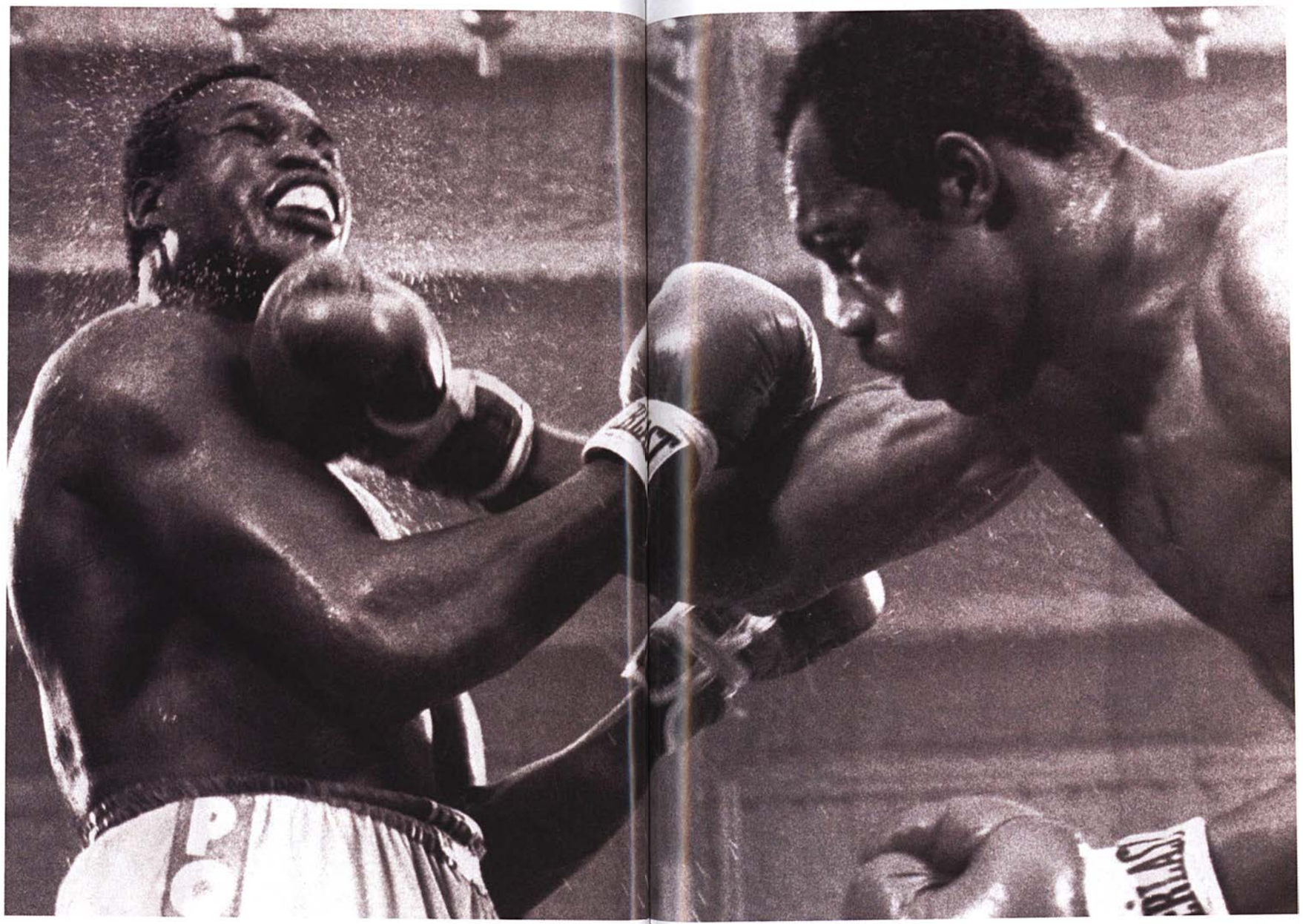
And Larry Holmes?

In 1977, he was in Las Vegas seeking an identity against another barely-known named Ibar "The Sailor" Arrington. Holmes and I were standing in the casino at Caesars Palace when a matronly looking woman approached us. She had noticed his 6-3 height.

"Oh," she said, "what team do you play for? I'd love to buy tickets for my husband. He loves basketball."

Holmes turned to me and said, "I'm 25-0. What the hell

JOHN IACONO



After falling behind early, Norton began landing some solid bombs.

I got to do for people to know who I am?"

Holmes and Norton were twin travelers down a hard-luck highway, shadowboxing to the accompaniment of a lonely blues fugue. Neither of them realized that they were headed toward an accidental collision course that would produce one of the greatest heavyweight fights in history.

It was a fight that wasn't supposed to happen. First, Norton won a WBC-mandated box-off over Jimmy Young. Since Muhammad Ali had agreed to fight the winner after he disposed of Leon Spinks, Norton was handed a diploma that read "WBC champion." All he had to do was watch television until Ali won. But Ali lost, and that night when Spinks was asked if he would fight Norton, he said:

"Talk to my lawyer."

That's boxing for "Blow a rematch and leave all that money on the table? Are you out of your freaking mind?"

So, the WBC had a champion by diploma but nobody for him to fight. In retaliation, it stripped Spinks of his title, officially named Norton as world titleholder and ordered him to face Holmes, the No. 1 contender. Las Vegas would be the site.

But as soon as the fighters arrived in Gomorrah-by-the-Desert, the whole damned thing teetered on the edge of disaster.

On fight day minus six, Holmes was sparring as usual with Louis Rodriguez in the airless Sports Pavilion at Caesars. The public wasn't there. It was as much ritual as it was preparation. He had already begun to peak and there were surely no mysteries in Louis Rodriguez for him. Collectively they had traded perhaps 10,000 punches since Larry Holmes became a pro.

Holmes released a left jab and caught an elbow directly on the biceps. And then there was this spear inside the muscle and it was burrowing deeper and deeper until he felt the pain from his eyebrows down to his ankles.

They got him the hell off the floor with as little fuss as possible. But nobody had to tell Larry Holmes it was bad ... not Richie Giachetti, the trainer, who had been through so much with him – the hunger, the frustration, the depression – and not Freddie Brown, the old boxing veteran who was hired as an assistant trainer and cut man for this fight.

And, certainly, not even Rodriguez, who died a little within himself with the thought of what it might mean.

The biceps was torn.

In that instant, there was no reason to believe this fight would ever happen. They summoned Caesars house physician Dr. Joe Fink, who took one look and sent them straight down to Desert Springs Hospital to Keith Kleven, who for decades was by far the best physical therapist in town. Getting Holmes out of the hotel to the hospital and back without being seen was mandatory. Each of them knew the fight was in serious jeopardy.

When I arrived, two days later, I couldn't find Holmes ... not then ... not Wednesday. He held a very brief press conference on Thursday morning but hadn't trained for five days. When a man fighting for the heavyweight championship lays off any work at all for the better part of a week, you do not have to be too smart to know something is wrong.

We sat in his suite that afternoon and Giachetti tactfully said to his fighter, "Don't tell him crap, Larry."

"You want me to leave?" I asked Holmes.

"No, I want *him* to leave."

I had known Larry since he had been a kid sparring partner for Ali. I was there the day he got a black eye and when advised to put a raw steak on it, he refused. "I want everyone to know," he said back then, "who it was who gave me my black eye."

After Giachetti walked out, Larry told me that his left arm felt dead and explained how it happened. So now I knew what it was, but in a situation like that, Larry Holmes deserved to handle his own options. I decided that some stories deserve not to be written just for the sake of a headline. I agreed I'd wait until after the fight.

Meanwhile, Kleven knew exactly what was wrong and how to handle it. When he wasn't treating Larry with what he called high galvanic stimulation (electricity to you), he was locked in a nonstop debate with Giachetti.

"The fight is on," Giachetti thundered.

"Not until I say it is," Kleven shot back.

"I'm his trainer and I say it is."

"He's my patient and I will tell you when it's on."

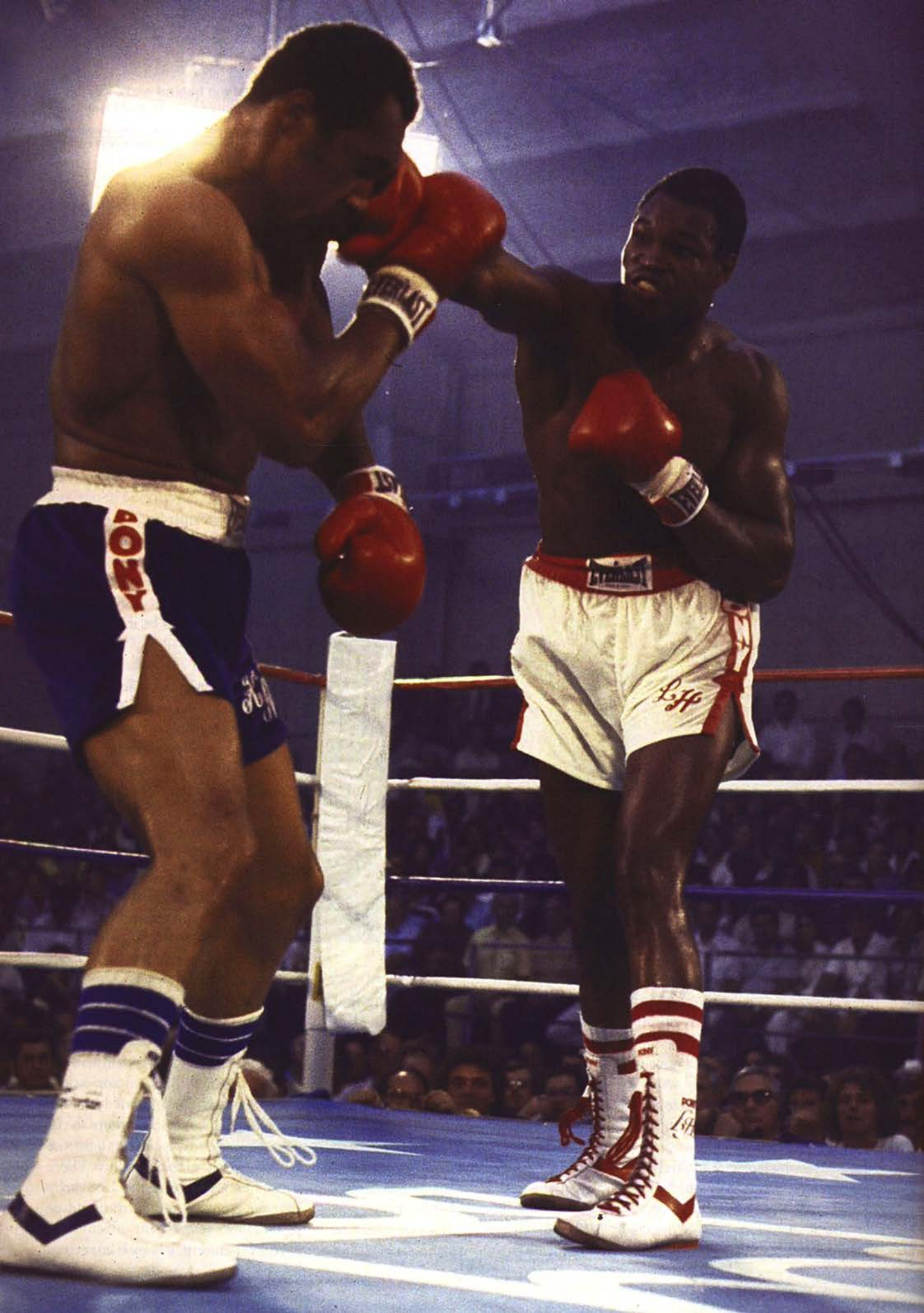
In the end, it really didn't matter. Larry knew he was going to fight. He asked Keith to be in the corner. Keith told him:

"Look, you can fight. ... But you can't take a hit on the biceps or you are done. I can't help you if that happens."

But the fight went on as scheduled. The Holmes camp was hungry and desperate and saw no other options. For the full 15 rounds, their fighter performed. Norton couldn't take advantage of him from the start because he didn't even know about the injury. And what they gave us was a close second to Ali-Frazier III. Believe me, because I saw both live.

It began as a boxing clinic with Professor Holmes in charge ... rat-tat-tat went the nonstop jab and BOOM went the uppercut or hook behind it. Despite the injury, Larry still had his left hand and, by his own admission, the jab and the hook carried him for six full rounds. But somewhere in the next two rounds, Kenny caught the biceps with a glancing blow. There wasn't enough electricity in nearby Hoover Dam to deflect the kind of pain Holmes felt.

Norton immediately took command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of the fight. He wiped out most of that six-round deficit with a combination of right and left hands that took the steam out of Holmes. But "most" is the operative word here. As a result, this nonstop battle raged all the way through the 14th.

There are very few tableaus in this strange business that equal what I saw before the start of Round 15. In one corner, Eddie "Bossman" Jones, Ken Norton's second, had an ice bag glued to the fighter's left eye, and kneeling in the ring was Bill Slayton, the trainer, pleading and urging and reminding the fighter of something he already knew all too well. It was, in truth, now or never.

HOLMES AND NORTON WERE TWIN TRAVELERS DOWN A HARD-LUCK HIGHWAY... THEY WERE HEADED TOWARD A COLLISION COURSE THAT WOULD PRODUCE ONE OF THE GREATEST HEAVYWEIGHT FIGHTS IN HISTORY.

Across the ring, Richie Giachetti, Slayton's counterpart, was down in front of Larry Holmes and he was telling him he could have it all if he wanted it. He could put an end to the frustration and the big paydays that eluded them and the agonizing months of inactivity.

But now they were here and the answer was waiting across the ring and Giachetti kept reminding him about it. Then Freddie Brown, a dean of trainers himself but a second that night, leaned in and threw a ton of water over Larry and hollered at him: "Stay loose . . . Stay loose."

At the bell, the two of them were walking on rubbery legs, each guy trying desperately to bluff the other into thinking he had not lost his store of both cool and latent power. Actually, both had neither. They had reached the point where for them the night had become an all-out struggle for survival with what tools the blazing television lights had left them.

Now you can see this fight a lot of ways, and the way I saw it, it was dead even going into the 15th round. So here came Norton, with the water pouring off his head and the strange cross-handed guard of his, sliding forward and Holmes feinted the jab that went nowhere. Norton came over the top with a straight right hand and followed with a left hook and a straight right to the head. Holmes' mouth was awash with blood for the second time in this fight. For an instant, his legs wobbled and his eyes seemed to glaze.

It looked very much like it might be over. With each punch Kenny threw, he nearly collapsed. With each punch Larry caught, he nearly collapsed. Norton was banging out the last chorus of what seemed to be a slow, painful dirge.

But then, just when he seemed ready to end it, his firepower was gone and his breathing was labored.

Holmes was still struggling for balance, swaying agonizingly, aching legs quivering, feet flat and wobbly. In desperation, he made a decision that won the fight. Well, not quite a decision. It was more like a drowning man clawing his way toward a bobbing life preserver.

"I thought, 'The hell with it. I didn't come here to lose. To hell with my biceps. To hell with the pain. To hell with all the medical advice.'"

In that instant, he caught Kenneth squarely on the chin. Norton stopped. He stumbled. Holmes was all over him. Left hand or right hand, it no longer made a difference. He threw the fight's final 14 punches and landed 13 of them.

In his entire career it might have been the most ferocious one-and-a-half minutes Holmes ever put together.

Norton had so little left in his arsenal, it froze him.

Holmes made Norton pay for all the bad luck that had been his since he left school in Easton, Pennsylvania, to help support his mom and siblings with whatever he earned at the car wash. He was too tired to put him away and Norton was too proud to fall. But that last assault put Norton in a place from which there was no return.

Holmes won by a point on two judges' cards. He lost it by a point on the third and thus earned a split decision and the title. Then he left the arena and disappeared. The rumor was he was on his way to the hospital. The truth was that he had run out of the building and jumped into the hotel swimming pool in triumph alongside Giachetti.

Strange things often happen to young fighters after they win their first big one. They become better because of the special circumstances around that victory. It happened to Muhammad Ali when he looked across the ring at Sonny Liston refusing to leave his stool after the bell rang.

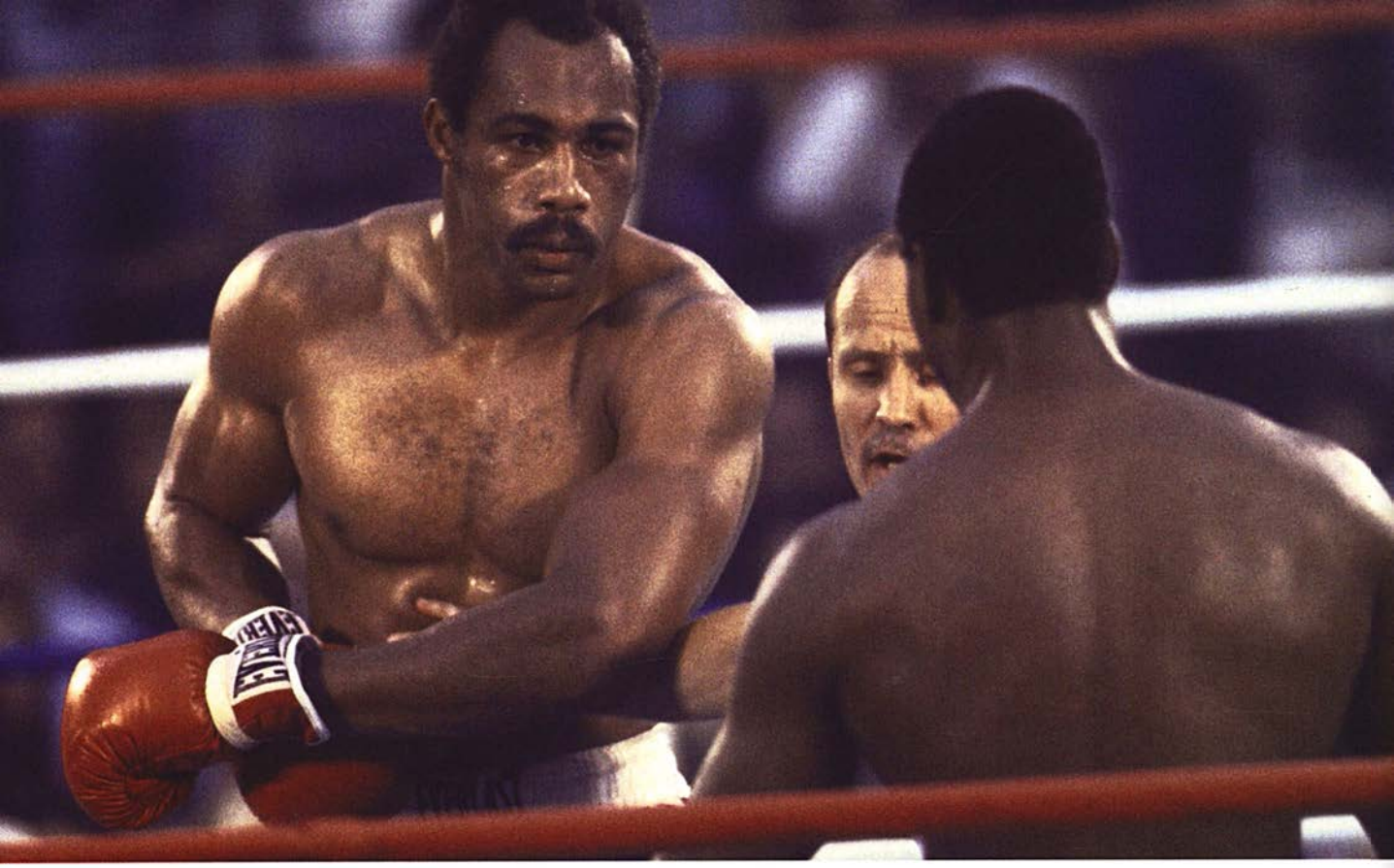
For Holmes, there was a similar epiphany. It was as though he had looked in the mirror and said, "My, oh, my. Look what I did, and wait until you see the second act."

He was right.

He became a great champion.

As for Norton, he fought on. But after falling short three times when belts were on the line (including a bitter controversial loss to Ali two-and-a-half years before losing to Holmes) and because of the way he ultimately acquired the WBC title, boxing history did not treat him as well as he truly deserved. Instead, he became the answer to a stunning trivia question:

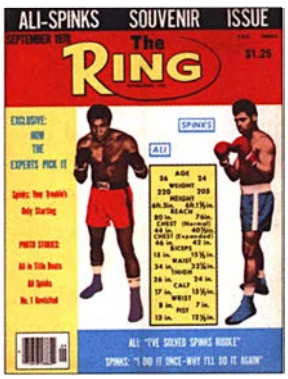
Who was the only heavyweight champion who never won a heavyweight title fight?



HOLMES OUTPOINTS NORTON TO WIN WBC HEAVY TITLE

THIS FIGHT REPORT ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE SEPTEMBER 1978 ISSUE OF THE RING MAGAZINE

By Shirley Norman



Larry Holmes... young, hungry and undefeated ... captured Ken Norton's two-month-old WBC heavyweight crown by way of a hairline-close split decision.

The fifteen-round blood and thunder battle took place at Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion in Las Vegas.

Holmes, who calls himself "The Easton Assassin," and Norton, sometimes known as the "Paper Champ," made no secret of their hatred for each other in the weeks preceding the bout.

The personal enmity between the two fighters exploded at the opening bell – as Holmes came out swinging with his long left jabs – and Norton immediately countered with overhand rights and combinations.

The second through fifth rounds were evenly matched – with Norton constantly eluding the Holmes attack by covering his face with both gloves.

Holmes, however, managed to get through with some furious shots to Norton's head and body. Ken countered with brutal combination punches and forced his opponent into a dance-around-the-ring strategy.

The sixth and seventh rounds saw Norton at his furious best – effectively ducking the Holmes jabs – and coming back with his own lethal lefts and overhand rights to the challenger's body.

Holmes spent the latter rounds running away from his older opponent – while Norton chased him around the ring, catching the challenger with

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bombshell combinations.

Holmes appeared to be tiring by the 12th – but came back to fight a brilliant 13th round.

The 13th was all Holmes, as "The Easton Assassin" attacked with every bomb in his arsenal. Norton was weary and staggered as the bell sounded.

Norton, however, was back in command by the 14th round, and pinned Holmes to a neutral corner – where he pummeled him with a barrage of head and body shots.

The 15th and final round saw both fighters engaged in one of boxing's most brutal battles.

Holmes hit Norton with numerous shots to the head – while Norton countered with several fierce uppercuts.

The Holmes fury staggered Norton momentarily but he recovered and countered with several vicious blows to Holmes' head and body.

The scoring was identical on the cards of all three judges: 143-142. Judge Lou Tabat favored Norton, but judges Joe Swessel and Harold Buck gave the decision and the WBC title to Holmes.

The scoring was even after the fourteenth round on the cards of all three judges. Holmes won the final round on the basis of his more consistent, more effective jabs. The dissenting judge, Lou Tabat, awarded the round to Norton, stating that Norton's punches were crisper – and his action more aggressive.

Predictions before the bout were divided among heavyweight experts.

Former champion Joe Louis felt that Norton would score a knockout – on the basis of his superior strength and experience.

Jimmy Young, a heavyweight contender, stated at the noon weigh-in: "It's pretty hard to pick a winner in this one. But if I had to make a choice, I'd say Norton. I know what Ken can do in the ring. Remember, I fought 15 rounds with him last November."

Former heavyweight contender Lou Nova predicted a Holmes victory on the basis of the challenger's youth, speed and agility.

Holmes stablemate Jody Ballard was adamant as he shouted: "Larry will tear him apart!"

Following the fight, a dejected Ken Norton met the press and stated: "It was a close fight – but I thought I won. I was saving my energy in the early rounds and planned to come on strong in the later rounds. This was a mistake in judgment. I guess I just got caught relaxing."

Ken went on: "I respect Holmes as a fighter, but as far as my personal feelings toward him – that's my own business.

"I thought I won this fight – just like I won the last Ali fight – although this one was much closer."

Norton concluded: "I can't change the judges' decision, so we'll have to put that in the past. I have absolutely no thought of retiring. And I'm game for a rematch with Holmes any time!"

Holmes was surprisingly humble in his after-fight press interviews and paid tribute to Norton's fighting ability.

"I never underestimated him," said Larry, "but he was stronger than I thought."

Their pre-fight enmity was buried in the ring, Holmes continued: "Ken fought like a man – and he lost like a man. And he was man enough to come over and congratulate me."

Holmes explained his victory: "I figured I won the early rounds with my long left jab. I gave him a few of the middle rounds, but you know how strong I looked in the 13th round, and I knew I had him in the 15th.

"I fought extra hard in that final round, because I wanted to give the people a good closing for this great show!"

Larry grinned: "I'm 28 years old, and my fighting record is 28-0. Twenty-eight is a pretty good number, right?"

Holmes stated that he had nothing to gain by fighting Norton again and that he would tackle the winner of the Ali-Spinks rematch for the undisputed heavyweight championship of the world.

"But I'll also fight anybody that comes along," concluded Holmes. "I plan to be a fighting champion for a lot of years to come."

The Norton-Holmes WBC heavyweight title bout was viewed by a capacity crowd of 5,600 at the Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion. With tickets going at $200, $150 and $50 ... the house was sold out days before the fight. Caesars Palace then installed closed-circuit television where 1,500 more fans viewed the fight for a $15 tariff.

(Home television was blacked-out in Nevada.)

The bout was televised by ABC throughout the United States and in several foreign countries. Ringside commentators were Howard Cosell and the veteran New York referee Arthur Mercante.

BETTMANN

RISE UP

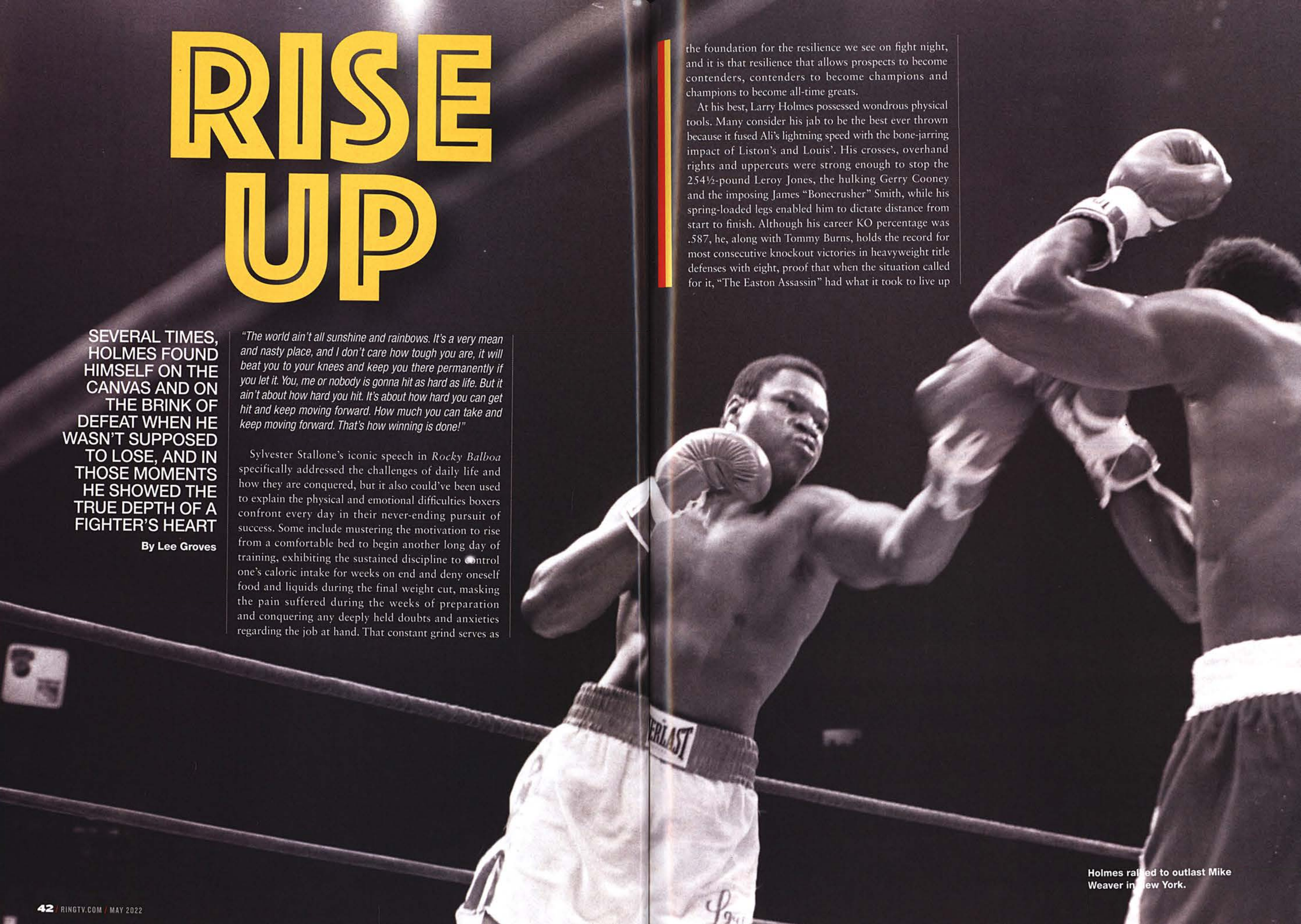
SEVERAL TIMES, HOLMES FOUND HIMSELF ON THE CANVAS AND ON THE BRINK OF DEFEAT WHEN HE WASN'T SUPPOSED TO LOSE, AND IN THOSE MOMENTS HE SHOWED THE TRUE DEPTH OF A FIGHTER'S HEART

By Lee Groves

"The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard you hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done!"

Sylvester Stallone's iconic speech in *Rocky Balboa* specifically addressed the challenges of daily life and how they are conquered, but it also could've been used to explain the physical and emotional difficulties boxers confront every day in their never-ending pursuit of success. Some include mustering the motivation to rise from a comfortable bed to begin another long day of training, exhibiting the sustained discipline to control one's caloric intake for weeks on end and deny oneself food and liquids during the final weight cut, masking the pain suffered during the weeks of preparation and conquering any deeply held doubts and anxieties regarding the job at hand. That constant grind serves as the foundation for the resilience we see on fight night, and it is that resilience that allows prospects to become contenders, contenders to become champions and champions to become all-time greats.

At his best, Larry Holmes possessed wondrous physical tools. Many consider his jab to be the best ever thrown because it fused Ali's lightning speed with the bone-jarring impact of Liston's and Louis'. His crosses, overhand rights and uppercuts were strong enough to stop the 254½-pound Leroy Jones, the hulking Gerry Cooney and the imposing James "Bonecrusher" Smith, while his spring-loaded legs enabled him to dictate distance from start to finish. Although his career KO percentage was .587, he, along with Tommy Burns, holds the record for most consecutive knockout victories in heavyweight title defenses with eight, proof that when the situation called for it, "The Easton Assassin" had what it took to live up



Holmes rallied to outlast Mike Weaver in New York.

to his nickname.

As visually compelling as his talents were, Holmes lifted himself to legendary status for how well he performed under pressure. Although he faced adversities throughout his career – he defeated the respected Roy Williams despite an injured right hand and won the WBC title from Ken Norton with a torn left biceps – four particular fights showcased his extraordinary recuperative powers. In each instance, Holmes was thrust into a crisis situation that forced him to reveal the deepest contents of his fistic character, and each time he produced the best possible result.

NOVEMBER 28, 1973 – KO 3 KEVIN ISAAC, CLEVELAND ARENA, CLEVELAND, OHIO

This was Holmes' third fight under the Don King Promotions banner, and it occurred on the undercard of Jimmy Dupree's 10-round draw against onetime light heavyweight title challenger Ray Anderson and Jeff Merritt's third-round TKO over onetime heavyweight title challenger Ron Stander. The 24-year-old Holmes entered the fight with a 6-0 (2 KOs) record while the 18-year-old Isaac (2-0, 1 KO) was a highly regarded prospect based on his winning the 1973 New York Golden Gloves.

In his autobiography, *Against All Odds*, Holmes saw himself as a "body for hire" based on the comments he heard about Isaac from King advisers Al Braverman and Paddy Flood. Those comments were supported by how Isaac performed in his most recent fight, a 79-second destruction of journeyman Johnny Jackson just 29 days earlier. It didn't matter that the 203-pound Holmes stood an inch-and-a-half taller and scaled 15 pounds heavier, especially after Isaac connected with a ferocious right hand.

"Kevin Isaac dropped me in the first round with a right hand that landed flush on my temple," Holmes told co-author Phil Berger. "Wham, and I was on my butt. First time as a professional. Any time that Hollywood depicts a knockout, it's always that shot to the point of the chin that does it. That's the movie cliche. But most fighters know it's the shot to the temple that knocks you off balance."

Buzzed as he might have been, Holmes rose to his feet and had the presence of mind to remember advice he received while serving as Ali's sparring partner at his Deer Lake training camp.

"After you've been knocked down, you have the element of surprise going for you if you fire back with bad intentions," Holmes observed. "The other guy is usually open as he rushes in to finish you off. So, if you keep your cool, you can get back in a hurry. Which is what I did with Isaac. I caught him with a punishing combination. The swagger went out of him like that."

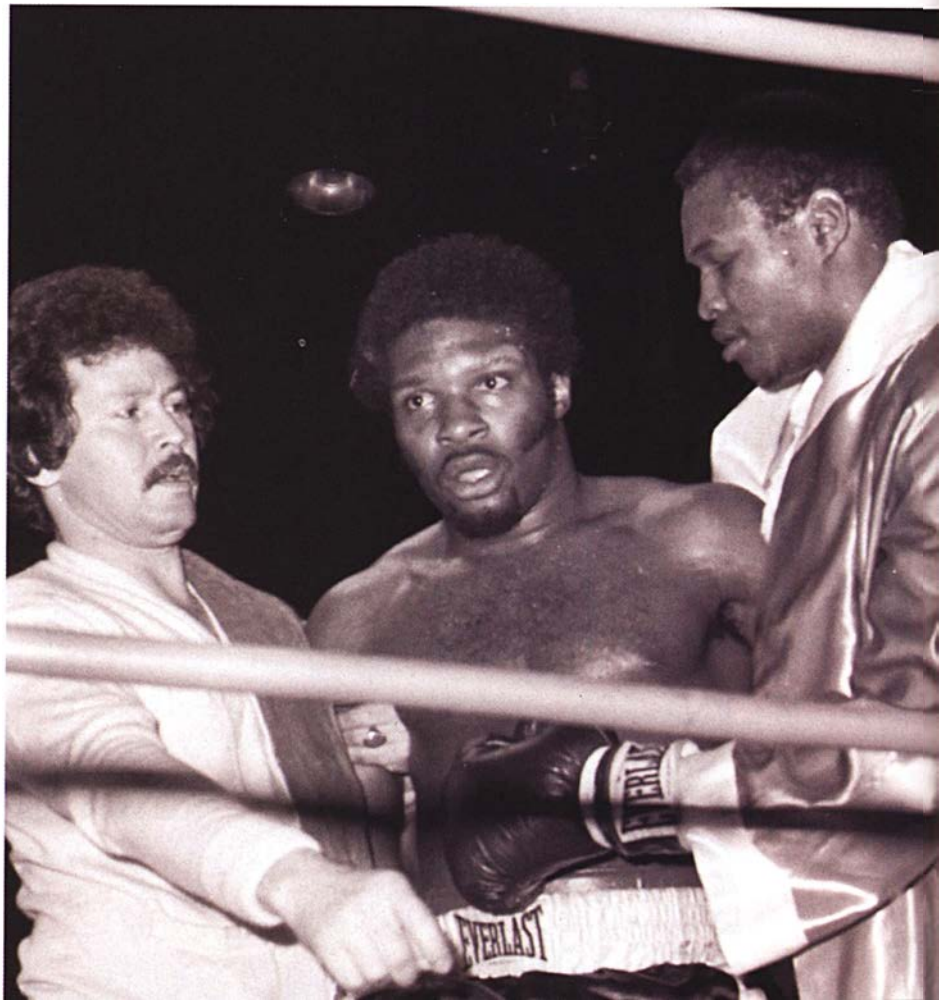
According to a fight report that indicated Holmes had been floored in Round 2 instead of Holmes' recollection of Round 1, that combination enabled him to even the knockdown score at 1-1.

In Round 3, Holmes noticed a telltale lapse in concentration.

"Isaac dropped his hands, just to relax a moment," Holmes said. "He relaxed, I punched. Bang: a right hand ... on time, as they say. I knocked him out. He was out cold for quite a while."

JUNE 22, 1979 – TKO 12 MIKE WEAVER, MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK

After Holmes successfully defended his WBC title against Alfredo Evangelista and Ossie Ocasio with a pair of seventh-round KOs on ABC, all three terrestrial networks turned down the opportunity to air his next defense against Weaver because the challenger's 19-8 (13 KOs) record didn't match his chiseled physique, a physique that moved Norton to nickname him "Hercules." Weaver



A stricken Kevin Isaac is helped back to his corner by his conqueror.

Earnie Shavers landed his best shot, but it wasn't enough.

was so unheralded that a writer for the magazine International Boxing titled his August 1979 article "Mike Who?" Adding insult to injury, the issue's cover depicted Holmes at the top center of a graphic detailing his potential "road to greatness," and while the other ovals showed pictures of Earnie Shavers, Leon Spinks, Kallie Knoetze, John Tate and Ali, Weaver's face was nowhere to be seen.

"Holmes is a good fighter, but he's not awesome," Weaver said in the article. "There ain't no more super-fighters around today. He can be beaten. I saw Ocasio hit him with shots. If it had been me hitting him, he wouldn't be standing."

The networks' rejection of Holmes-Weaver allowed HBO – then an upstart pay-cable network with approximately 2 million subscribers – to buy the broadcast rights for just $150,000. It was money well spent, for the challenger who had lost three of his first four fights and was beaten by Duane *and* Rodney Bobick nearly pulled off a monumental upset.

In reality, Holmes (30-0, 21 KOs) faced two opponents – an inspired Weaver and the flu, which infected Holmes a week earlier. The antibiotics left the champion feeling "strange," "dreamy" and "just plain flat," and, worse yet for Holmes, the challenger was about to show him that he was prepared to back up his bold pre-fight rhetoric.

After Holmes controlled the first two rounds with his long-range boxing, Weaver's persistent pressure began to pay dividends. His punches pierced Holmes' guard, punctured his ear drum and persuaded many in the crowd to shift their support. After absorbing a lathering midway through the fourth, Weaver stunned Holmes with a hook to the jaw, then landed a pair of rights that caused the champion to tumble to the canvas. Referee Harold Valan ruled the fall a slip, but the story line was indelibly established: If Holmes was to keep his title – as well as the $3 million he stood to make from his next fight with Shavers – he'd have to dig deep.

Weaver's rally forced Holmes to accept the stool for the first time in the fight, and over the next six rounds they took turns seizing the momentum. Holmes' consistent boxing helped him forge a lead on the scorecards, but a hefty right to the tip of the chin turned the champion's legs to rubber at the end of the 10th. Entering the "championship rounds" it was still anyone's fight.

With his left eye swelling rapidly, Holmes drew Weaver into an extended exchange, then retreated toward his corner and rested his back against the corner pad. It proved to be a trap. With 14 seconds remaining in Round 11, Holmes connected with a brutal right uppercut that left Weaver sprawled. The challenger used the ropes to pull himself up by Valan's count of eight, and while the bell gave Weaver a desperately needed respite, it wasn't enough to clear the cobwebs. Seeing this, Holmes backed Weaver against the ropes and blasted away with unanswered right hands, prompting Valan to intervene at the 44-second mark.

"The man was stronger than anybody thought," a hoarse Holmes told HBO's Larry Merchant. "The networks got fooled. All these fighters are somebody."

And because he had what it took to overcome illness and an ambitious antagonist, Holmes proved that he was "somebody" as well.

RISE UP

SEPTEMBER 28, 1979 – TKO 11 EARNIE SHAVERS, CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS

Holmes earned his title shot against Norton by comprehensively outpointing Shavers in a March 1978 WBC title eliminator while Shavers, in turn, earned his second chance at Holmes by blasting out Norton in 118 seconds on the undercard of Holmes-Ocasio in March 1979, a fight that also was billed as a WBC eliminator. Then, as now, the match pitted arguably the best left jab in history against the most potent right ever, as it accounted for many of the 57 knockouts in Shavers' 59-7-1 record. Between August 1970 and May 1972, Shavers scored 27 consecutive knockouts, including 19 inside of three rounds, but Holmes' exceptional movement and boxing ability allowed him to escape Shavers' thunder for 12 consecutive rounds, and that success – combined with the experience Holmes had gained from being a $145-per-week sparring partner for Shavers back in the day – resulted in Holmes being installed as a 3-to-1 favorite.

Holmes kept Shavers at bay for the first six rounds of the rematch with razor-sharp jabs while constantly circling away from the challenger's lethal right hand. Shavers said in his book, *Welcome to the Big Time*, that a stray thumb in Round 3 resulted in a retinal tear while Holmes' combinations opened cuts around both eyes, one of which would require 27 stitches.

Entering the seventh, all appeared lost for Shavers. But in the round's closing moments, he connected with a beautifully timed right to the jaw that felled Holmes like a petrified oak.

"I saw an opening for my uppercut and let it fly," Holmes recalled in his autobiography. "That's when I saw a blinding flash. I was sure a photographer's flashbulb had gone off right in my eyes."

At that moment, Shavers knew that his years of struggle were about to pay off.

"The punch I had been trying to land all night finally found its mark," he wrote. "An overhand right caught Holmes flush on the button, and down he went as if he'd suddenly been deboned. As I headed to the neutral corner, Holmes didn't stir. I was the heavyweight champion of the world. All my troubles were finally over. It was the greatest feeling I'd ever had.

"And it lasted for five whole seconds."

What Holmes did in the next few moments was miraculous; not only did he rise by Davey Pearl's count of five, he purposefully walked toward the farthest corner to put maximum distance between himself and Shavers.

"An ordinary fighter would have stood there dazed and helpless, waiting to be knocked down again," Pearl said later. "But as stunned as he must have been, Holmes reacted the way a smart, seasoned fighter should."

Holmes' fog lifted enough for him to avoid most of Shavers' wild swings for the round's final 33 seconds, and the one-minute break was enough for him to regain his equilibrium. Incredibly, Holmes started the eighth on his toes and he spent the entire round picking away at Shavers' eyes with pinpoint jabs while also landing robust crosses and searing uppercuts. Meanwhile, the tiring Shavers marched straight ahead and futilely sought to replicate his seventh-round magic.

It was not to be. The ninth and 10th saw Holmes masterfully out-box and out-punch his exhausted challenger, who could do little more than hold up his gloves. In the 11th, a crackling cross prompted Pearl to step in and briefly inspect Shavers, who convinced him to let the fight continue. But after Holmes connected with a cross, an uppercut and a hook that caused Shavers to reel to his left, Pearl stepped in at the 2:00 mark.

For the second consecutive fight, Holmes stared down the strong possibility of losing his championship and his undefeated record. And for the second consecutive fight, Holmes' reservoir of intangibles came to his rescue.

NOVEMBER 6, 1981 – KO 11 RENALDO SNIPES, CIVIC ARENA, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Following the Shavers conquest, Holmes added six more victories to extend his reign to nearly three-and-a-half years and 10 successful defenses while also upping his record to 38-0 (28 KOs). As he did so, Holmes' next marquee challenger emerged as Cooney bulldozed his way to a 25-0 (21 KOs) mark and the WBC's No. 1 ranking thanks to his crushing one-round knockouts over the aged shells of Ron Lyle and Norton. Along with Leonard versus Hearns, Holmes versus Cooney was boxing's most desired dream fight, and all Holmes needed to do to secure this mega-match – and the mega-millions that came with it – was repel the challenge of the 22-0 (11 KOs) Snipes before the champion's home state fans in Pittsburgh.

Like Holmes-Weaver, the first six rounds were competitive as Holmes piled up points while the hard-charging Snipes – a quirky, confident character with a fast-twitch, shape-shifting style – answered with bombs that occasionally broke through Holmes' guard. Early in the seventh, however, the man nicknamed "Mister" nearly changed the course of history. Two flicking lefts set the table for a thunderous right that deadened the nerves in Holmes' legs and sent him tumbling to the floor. The stricken champion tried to quickly regain his feet but instead stumbled face-first into the neutral corner pad. Suddenly, the fight's hopeful tagline of "Imminent Danger" became all too real, for Holmes was confronted with the unenviable task of fending off a hungry and disrespected challenger for the next two-plus minutes.

Once again, however, Holmes' pride and poise helped him regain his bearings by referee Rudy Ortega's count of six, and as the wild-eyed Snipes roared in for the kill of a lifetime, the champion's eyes and reactions had recovered their sharpness. Soon it was he who was chasing Snipes, landing heavy rights with rapidity and precision. Holmes' recovery was so complete that, absent the knockdown, one could argue he had done enough to win the round.

Rounds 8 through 10 saw the counterpunching Holmes fend off the energetic Snipes with piston-like jabs and knifing crosses that worsened the challenger's facial damage. In the 11th, Holmes injected more snap into his jabs, and those jabs set up a meaty right that wobbled Snipes' legs. Holmes then trapped Snipes against his own corner pad and landed four clean rights to the head, which prompted Ortega to intervene. Many, especially Snipes, thought Ortega's stoppage was premature, but despite the criticism and the crowd's obscene chants, Holmes' tenacity, composure and comeback capacity were beyond debate.

"Yes, he landed a good shot that time with another overhand right," Holmes told ABC's Howard Cosell from ringside. "But, you know, I've been hit before. Earnie Shavers knocked me down, Kevin Isaac knocked me down, but my record speaks for itself. I'm still undefeated, I got up and I won the fight. That's all that counts."

There would be other tests of Holmes' fortitude. Tim Witherspoon shook him in the ninth before losing a split decision to Holmes in May 1983 while Carl "The Truth" Williams channeled the younger version of Holmes for 15 hard rounds two years later. While Father Time eroded Holmes' skills, the strength of his fighting heart never waned, and, for that, he will forever own a revered place in boxing history. RING

Lee Groves is a boxing writer and historian based in Friendly, West Virginia. He is also a researcher and punch-counter for CompuBox, Inc. as well as a panelist on "In This Corner: The Podcast" on FITE.TV. He is the author of Tales from the Vault: A Celebration of 100 Boxing Closet Classics and the co-author of Muhammad Ali: By the Numbers. Email Groves (l.groves@frontier.com) or send him a message via Facebook and Twitter (@leegrovesboxing).

Holmes had to rally to halt Mike Weaver's unexpectedly hard challenge.

FANNING THE FLAMES

THE UGLY, RACIALLY CHARGED BUILDUP TO THE 1982 SUPERFIGHT BETWEEN LARRY HOLMES AND GERRY COONEY WAS AN UNFORTUNATE THROWBACK TO "GREAT WHITE HOPE" PROMOTIONS OF THE PAST

By Randy Gordon

It was a typical broiling summer day in Nevada as the referee brought the fighters together at mid-ring to start their long-anticipated heavyweight championship fight, which the promoter billed as "The Fight of the Century." It was the ultra-popular undefeated white challenger, who was called "The Great White Hope," against the powerful black champion.

As the two stood face to face in mid-ring, the challenger said to the champion, "Today, White America is going to be proud." The champion merely flashed a wide smile at the challenger in return. He didn't have to say anything. His smile said more than words. The challenger knew, then and there, it wasn't going to be his night. He was right. The champion toyed with him – much to the dismay of White America – stopping him in the 15th round.

That fight, which matched heavyweight champion Jack Johnson against former heavyweight champion James J. Jeffries, took place on July 4, 1910, in Reno, Nevada. The venue was constructed solely for this purpose – the first time an arena had been constructed for a single event – and put in nearly 16,000 fans – 99 percent of them white. Sadly, the fight was based much more on race than on boxing.

It was originally supposed to take place in San Francisco, but three weeks before the bout, California Governor James Gillett made promoter Tex Rickard take it out of the state due to pressure from church groups and civic leaders on grounds that the fight was morally and religiously wrong. Rickard bailed out and quickly moved the bout to Reno, where boxing between men of any color was legal.

Jeffries had retired almost six years earlier, after a sixth-round knockout of Jack Munroe. The title then bounced from Marvin Hart in 1905 to Tommy Burns in 1906. But when Johnson took the title from Burns in 1908, toying with him on the way to police stopping the fight in the 14th round of their scheduled 20-rounder, White America began the search for a "Great White Hope." It desperately wanted someone to beat the brash, arrogant, rule-defying Johnson.

All it could come up with was the 35-year-old, sadly out-of-shape Jeffries. The talk of "saving America" – along with $101,000 (almost $3 million today) – was enough to make Jeffries end retirement.

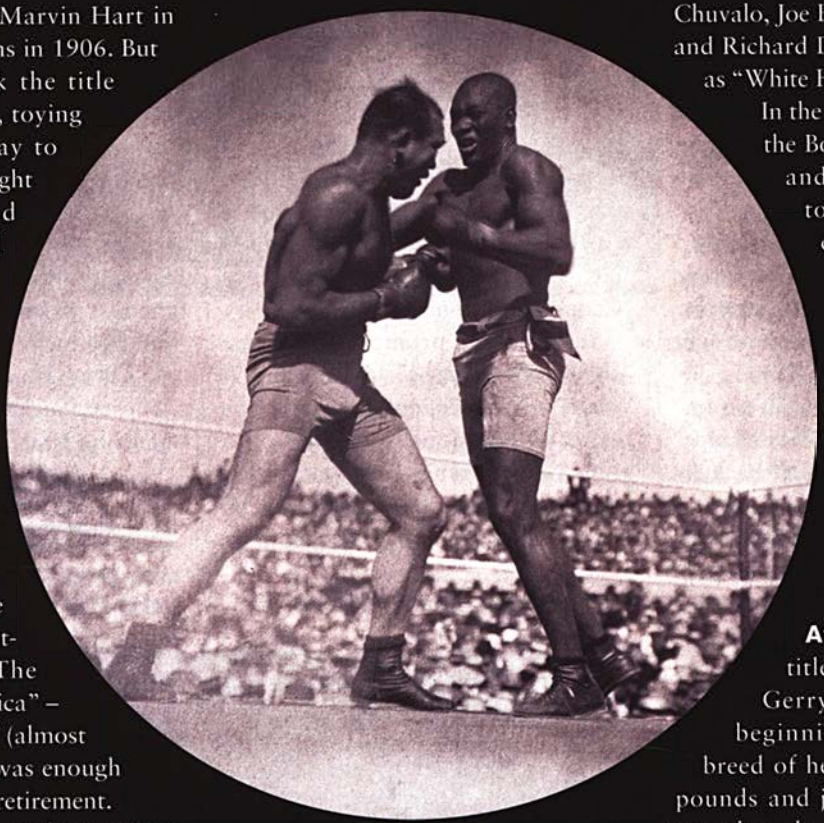
As he had done with so many opponents, the 208-pound Johnson played with the 227-pound "Boilermaker" from Burbank, California. Johnson ended the fight in the 15th round with three knockdowns.

Following the fight, race riots broke out across the country, with black men being attacked by angry white mobs. "The Great White Hope" had been battered, bloodied and beaten, and White America wouldn't stand for it.

White America finally got what it was looking for on April 5, 1915, when Jess Willard fulfilled their "hopes," beating Johnson by knockout in the 26th round.

Following Willard's victory, White America lost its "need" for a "Great White Hope." That's because the next heavyweight champion of African-American descent came along 22 years later in the form of Joe Louis, who was a beloved figure both in and out of the sport.

Following Louis were two African-American heavyweights – Ezzard Charles and Jersey Joe Walcott.



The Holmes-Cooney pre-fight commentary conjured up ugly memories of Johnson-Jeffries.

Neither was flamboyant enough to antagonize White America. They were respected by everyone. When Rocky Marciano stepped into the ring in September 1952 to face Walcott, he was not regarded as a "Great White Hope." He was just "The Brockton Blockbuster."

Following Marciano were Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston, with a quick visit to the heavyweight title by Ingemar Johansson.

While Sonny Liston was no fan favorite, the man who took his title – Cassius Marcellus Clay – was brash, loud and controversial, just like Jack Johnson. Outside of die-hard boxing fans, much of White America wanted to see Clay – who became Muhammad Ali in 1964 – beaten. The term "Great White Hope" was pulled out of mothballs.

At one point, Henry Cooper, Karl Mildenberger, Brian London, George Chuvalo, Joe Bugner, Oscar Bonavena and Richard Dunn were all regarded as "White Hopes."

In the mid-1970s, along came the Bobick Brothers – Duane and Rodney. Both were touted – much to their chagrin – as "White Hopes," especially Duane. A 58-second knockout loss to Ken Norton on May 11, 1977, ended his title aspirations, and back-to-back stoppage losses two years later ended his career.

At the time Bobick's title dreams were ending, Gerry Cooney's were just beginning. He was the new breed of heavyweight – 220-plus pounds and just over 6-foot-6. He was also a brutal puncher, with a left hook unmatched by any heavyweight on the planet.

Cooney turned pro in 1977, winning all seven of his fights that year, six by knockout. He followed with eight more fights, eight more victories and six more knockouts in 1978. He was the fastest-rising, most talked-about heavyweight in the world.

When Larry Holmes beat Ken Norton for the WBC title on June 9, 1978, Cooney was 11-0 and heading up the ratings. Promoter Don King, who had promotional rights with Holmes, also wanted to sign Cooney.

Cooney's management team of Dennis Rappaport and Mike Jones wanted Cooney to stay a free agent. They kept him busy. Cooney fought four times in 1978 after Holmes beat Norton, and seven more times in 1979. Included was a third-round stoppage of contender John Denis in Madison Square Garden on November 9 of that year. The victory over Denis upped Cooney's record to 21-0. Every victory took him another step closer to a shot against Holmes. It also made him the newest in boxing's long line of "Great White Hopes."

Cooney didn't like the label any more than he liked the nickname his managers had suggested for him when he turned pro: "Candy Kisses Cooney."

"I'm neither of those names," Cooney said back then. "I can't stand the 'Candy Kisses Cooney' nickname, and I feel just as strongly about 'The Great White Hope.'"

"Candy Kisses Cooney" disappeared. "The Great White Hope" label didn't, especially after back-to-back first-round knockouts of Ron Lyle in October 1980 and Ken Norton in 1981. Ironically, the destruction of Norton came on the same date (May 11) and arena (MSG) as Norton's first-round wipeout of Duane Bobick four years earlier.

After Cooney's 54-second annihilation of Norton, Holmes-Cooney was inevitable.

Following Cooney's win over Norton, which upped his record to 25-0 (21 KOs), Larry Holmes told The Ring, "Me and Cooney is gonna happen. I can't wait until that day, because I don't like him. I don't like 'Looney Cooney' one little bit."

Holmes stayed busy in 1981, fighting Trevor Berbick one month before Cooney faced Norton. Holmes then fought twice more that year – against Leon Spinks in June and Renaldo Snipes in November – which upped Holmes' record to 39-0 (29 KOs). A fight against Cooney was signed right after the Snipes fight. It was set for March 25, 1982.

Artist LeRoy Neiman, a huge boxing fan, painted the poster for Holmes-Cooney. Both the poster and the fight had to be put on hold when Cooney suffered a shoulder injury. The shoulder needed rest and rehab, not surgery. The bout was rescheduled for June 11.

From the moment the fight was announced, a bitterness not seen in boxing since Johnson vs. Jeffries emerged.

The promotion should have been about the two best heavyweights on the planet battling it out for the heavyweight championship. The promotion should have been about one of the best heavyweight champions ever against a solid contender. The promotion should have been about Larry Holmes' great jab against the rib-cracking power of Cooney's left hook.

Instead, the promotion became about race. It was black vs. white. It was the black champion against the "Great White Hope."

Cooney wasn't into it but his managers – who believed the racial polarization would sell the fight more – were.

"Cooney is not the 'White Hope,'" said his co-manager, Mike Jones. "He is the 'Right Hope.'"

At a press conference for the fight, Don King said, "This is not about black against white. It is not about race in any way. It's boxing's two biggest, best heavyweights. One happens to be black. One happens to be white." For a fight not about race, both sides were doing a terrific job about reminding everyone that it was black against white.

The bitterness between the two fighters built.

One day, while at a fight card being televised by ABC, Cooney was asked to join sportscaster Howard Cosell at ringside. During Cosell's interview, Holmes walked to within a few feet from where Cosell stood with Cooney. Words were tossed back and forth. Cooney reached out to slap Larry. Security had to step in to separate them. It was that way every time they ran into each other.

"I was 11 years old when Jack Johnson fought James J. Jeffries," Hall of Fame trainer Ray Arcel told The

A brief moment of levity during an otherwise poisonous buildup.

It was Holmes' speed and class vs. Cooney's explosive hitting power.

Ring the week before the fight. Arcel was one of Holmes' cornermen for the Cooney fight.

"Johnson-Jeffries was disgustingly racial," said Arcel. "This fight is worse."

The 10-fight undercard was interesting and was fought in temperatures that exceeded 100 degrees. Featured were three heavyweight bouts and a junior featherweight championship in which Wilfredo Gomez, of Puerto Rico, stopped rugged Mexican challenger Juan Antonio Lopez in the 10th round.

In those heavyweight bouts, James "Quick" Tillis picked himself off the canvas in the ninth round to hold on and win a 10-round unanimous decision over hard-hitting Earnie Shavers; Trevor Berbick won a 10-round unanimous decision against Greg Page, handing him his first defeat in 20 fights; and Mitch "Blood" Green won a six-round unanimous decision against Walter Santemore. Green had been Holmes' main sparring partner for the fight, with his height (nearly 6-foot-6) and long reach helping Holmes prepare for Cooney.

Finally, it was fight time. Around us was an awesome, breathtaking scene. There was a capacity crowd of 29,284 (with a paid gate of $7,293,600). Behind me and The Ring's publisher, Bert Sugar, was the "celebrity section." It was star-studded: Jack Nicholson, Wayne Gretzky, Farrah Fawcett, Ryan O'Neal and Joe DiMaggio were just a handful of the rich and famous who had come to witness this event.

A roar went up. One of the fighters was on his way to the ring. It was Gerry Cooney. A few moments later, Holmes made his way into the ring to an equal ovation. Then something very curious happened.

Ring announcer Chuck Hull took the microphone as the timekeeper rang the bell. Hull began his introductions. Instead of announcing the challenger first, followed by the champion, it was the other way around.

"Introducing, in the red corner, fighting from Easton, Pennsylvania, weighing 212½ pounds, the undefeated WBC heavyweight champion of the world, the 'Easton Assassin,' Larry Holmes."

Did Chuck Hull actually introduce the champion first? Sugar was so stunned that his jaw dropped and his unlit cigar fell onto the press table.

"What the ...," uttered Sugar.

Hull continued.

"And, in the blue corner, fighting out of Huntington, New York, weighing 225½ pounds, he is undefeated in his professional career, he is ranked number one by both the WBA and the WBC ... introducing 'Gentleman' Gerry Cooney."

Why was Holmes introduced first? The champion is always introduced after the challenger.

"I was asked on my way out of the dressing room if I'd mind being introduced first. I really didn't care," Holmes told The Ring. "I really didn't. That was Gerry's night. I got that. He could have anything he wanted – except the victory."

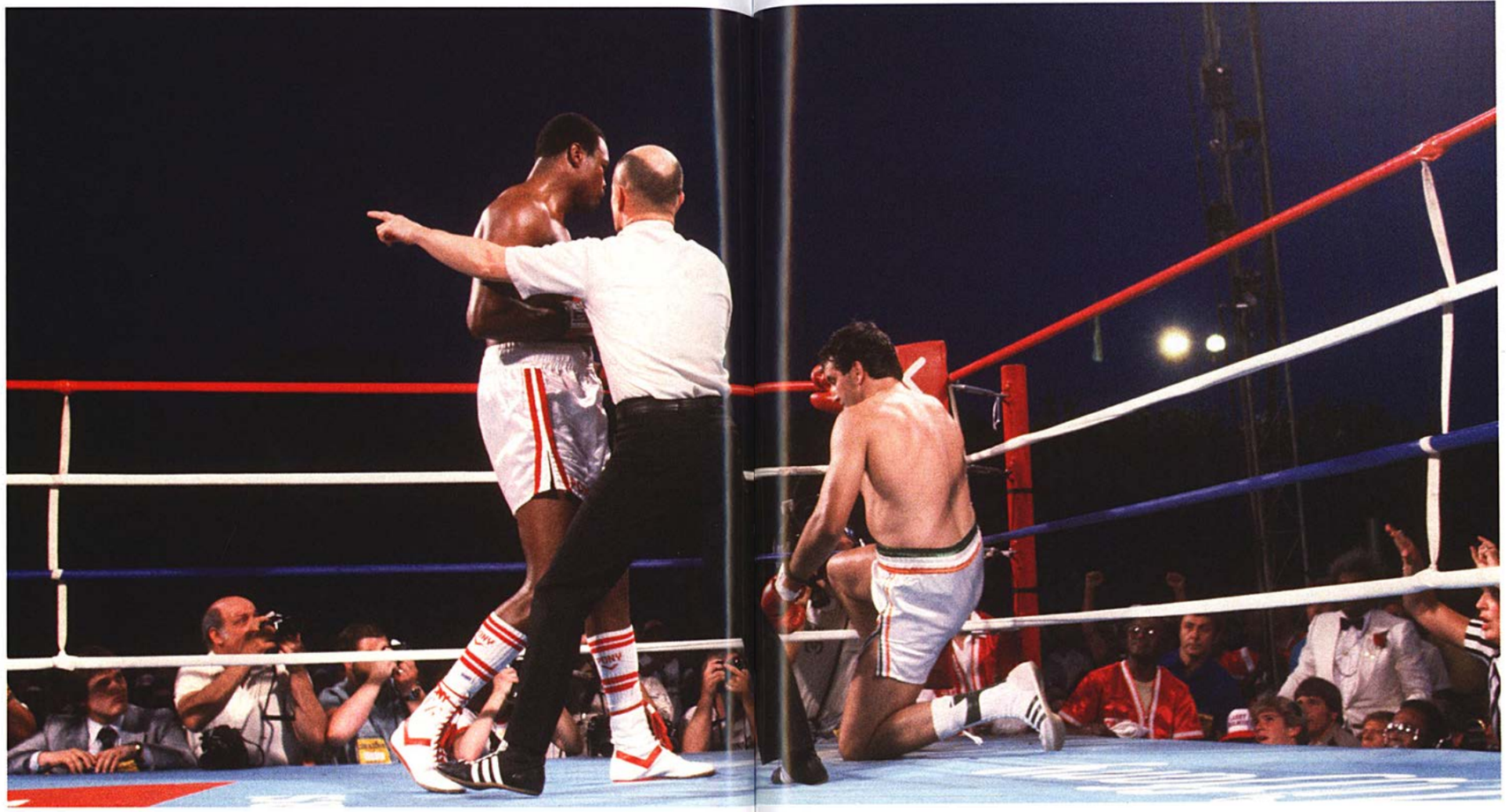
Referee Mills Lane met with both fighters in the middle of the ring. He quickly went over the instructions he had given both in detail in their respective dressing rooms. He asked if either "have any questions." Then he said, "Shake hands and let's get it on!"

As the two touched gloves, Holmes said, "Let's have a good fight!"

Those five little words set the tone of what would become a heavyweight classic. Those five little words were five of the most meaningful words Larry Holmes ever spoke. Those five little words were five of the most powerful Gerry Cooney ever heard. To him, those five words meant, "Forget all that racial stuff. Forget the animosity. Forget the name-calling. Forget the ugliness. We're fighters, and this is what we do. Let's have a good fight!"

As the fight was about to start, I reached into my left jacket pocket for my bottle of water. It was stuck. It was quite obvious as I pulled and tugged to get it out.

"What are you doing?" asked Sugar.



A sharp right cross put the challenger down late in Round 2.

"I'm trying to get my water," I replied.

He then leaned close and said, "Listen, I heard from my friend in the FBI that there are sharpshooters all over the arena."

"What!" I gasped.

"Look on top of Caesars Palace," he said.

I turned to my right and looked up. On the roof of Caesars Palace, off in the distance, I saw a few tiny figures. Riflemen. Sharpshooters. They were looking through telescopic sights on high-powered rifles.

"They are in the camera stands, too," said Sugar. "They're hidden behind the plastic drapes. Death threats were made to both Holmes and Cooney. The FBI is watching everyone in this crowd. So, keep your hands out of your jacket pocket."

As thirsty as I was, I didn't reach for my water bottle again.

In Round 1, Holmes boxed and moved in circles, firing quick, long jabs as Cooney stalked him, trying to time his rhythm.

Round 2 was interesting, with Holmes boxing and showing his world-class jab as Cooney continually pressed him, looking to land his vaunted hook.

With 30 seconds remaining in the round, Cooney was caught with a right to the head. He wobbled, stumbled and fell.

"I thought to myself, 'What are you doing down here, Gerry?'" Cooney said to The Ring. "'Get up and fight.'" He did exactly that, winning many of the next few rounds with his pressure and surprisingly quick hands.

The rounds melted away in the Las Vegas heat, which exceeded 120 degrees in the ring. After six rounds, judge Duane Ford had Cooney ahead, 57-56, while judges Dave Moretti and Jerry Roth had Holmes by 57-56 and 58-55, respectively.

In the ninth, as Cooney was aiming a left uppercut to the body, Holmes fired a left that sailed over Cooney's right shoulder. As Cooney was bending to his left to deliver the punch, Holmes' left wrapped around Cooney's neck, pulling him down. The uppercut landed with a resounding thud – directly between Holmes' legs. The crowd let out a collective "Ohhhhhh!" Holmes doubled over in agony. Cooney stood by, watching as referee Lane went over to Holmes to ask if he was OK. When he said he needed a few moments, Lane turned to Cooney and deducted two points from him for the low blow.

"I was horrified," said Cooney. "I didn't mean that."

While all three judges had Cooney winning the round, all marked their scorecards 9-8 for Holmes because of the deduction. Holmes recovered quickly, and the fight resumed.

Holmes and Cooney split the next two rounds, with Cooney having his best round in the 10th. In the closely contested 11th, Cooney lost another point for a low blow and lost the round 10-8 on all three judges' scorecards.

The greatness of the champion, combined with the brutal heat and Cooney's inactivity coming into the fight, started to catch up with Cooney in the 12th. His punches became slower and his punch volume dropped.

"I saw that," Holmes told The Ring, "so I picked up the pace."

In the 13th round, Holmes' experience and recent activity – and Cooney's lack of it – brought the fight to a conclusion.

The champion used his jab – perhaps the best in heavyweight history – over and over. Cooney couldn't stop it. With 30 seconds remaining in the round, Holmes let his hands go. He stepped inside and unleashed a volley of blows. A right uppercut to the chin staggered Gerry. With just over 10 seconds to go in the round, a sharp right to the head turned Cooney's legs to spaghetti and he wobbled, sagging against the ropes. Had his right arm not been draped over the top rope, Cooney would have gone down.

Victor Valle had seen enough. He wasn't just Gerry's trainer. Gerry was like a son to him. Valle sprang through the ropes and headed to his fighter. Referee Lane immediately waved the fight off as Valle hugged his beaten fighter. Under Nevada rules, the fight was a disqualification at 2:52 of the 13th round because of Valle entering the ring, however the official outcome was a TKO for Holmes. (The night of the fight, NSAC Executive Director Harold Buck considered changing the result to a DQ, but it never happened. Holmes told me, "I don't care how they ruled it, as long as they put a 'W' in front of the result!")

There was minor post-fight controversy as judges Ford and Moretti each had Cooney winning in rounds, 7-5, but trailing on points, 113-111. Had Cooney not been penalized three points, they would have had him in the lead at the time of the stoppage.

In a recent interview with The Ring, Cooney said, "The scorecards didn't matter. I still had two more rounds to go with that great champion. I learned so much from that fight. Holmes taught me so much. I was always hoping for a rematch, but it just didn't happen."

In his post-fight interview, Holmes said, "They keep saying that I'm not what Muhammad Ali used to be, or Joe Louis or Joe Frazier or George Foreman. I don't want to be what those guys used to be. I just want to be Larry Holmes. I just want to fight for the people. No colors involved, nothing like that."

Immediately after the fight, Cooney was choked up, apologizing to those who had rooted for him, continually saying, "I'm sorry." He said he'd be back to work in the gym soon and return to action before long. He didn't anticipate the deep hole of alcoholism he was about to fall into and the 27 months of inactivity that would follow.

Holmes made a phone call to Cooney almost two years after the fight, telling him, "You are a hell of a fighter. It's time for you to get back into the ring." Those words reignited Cooney's drive to fight again.

Holmes finished his Hall of Fame career in July 2002, after a 10-round decision win against Eric "Butterbean" Esch. He was 69-6 (44 KOs). Cooney finished his after a second-round stoppage loss to George Foreman in January 1990. His final numbers were 28-3 (24 KOs).

Now, as the 40th anniversary of the fight approaches, Larry Holmes and Gerry Cooney have become best friends. They attend functions together, they visit each other's home and they travel together.

Yes, it's been 40 years since Larry Holmes faced Gerry Cooney in a great fight with an ugly, racially charged buildup. It has been 40 years that have seen them go from being bitter enemies to inseparable pals.

With the anniversary of the Larry Holmes-Gerry Cooney fight at hand, we think back to that unforgettable fight in the Nevada desert 40 years ago.

Although the pre-fight atmosphere felt the same as that other heavyweight title fight in the desert 112 years ago must have felt, nothing but good has come out of Holmes-Cooney.

I think all who were there or watched it and rooted for one guy or the other have learned a lot, and maybe even changed for the better.

It's a long way we've come from those nights in the Nevada desert, both in 1910 and in 1982.

WORLD

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE

HOLMES' DECISION TO FIGHT FOR THE IBF TITLE WAS A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN BOXING'S EVOLUTION TOWARD THE BELT-JAMMED LANDSCAPE OF TODAY

By Cliff Rold

Above: Following Leon Spinks' shocking upset of Ali, the championship was split for the first time in years.

To the chagrin of boxing purists, today's boxing can be referred to as the four-belt era. With franchise, super, regular and interim belts around, fans are lucky if any weight class is whittled down to just four fighters claiming to be champion.

Despite the clutter, for a large section of boxing's business and fandom, the idea of "undisputed" maintains value. What does undisputed mean in 2022?

Its popular definition in the four-belt era relies on a fighter holding the International Boxing Federation (IBF), primary World Boxing Association (WBA), World Boxing Council (WBC) and World Boxing Organization (WBO) belts.

Canelo Alvarez, Josh Taylor, Jessica McCaskill and Katie Taylor are undisputed champions right now. They collected all the hardware. They stand apart from their peers.

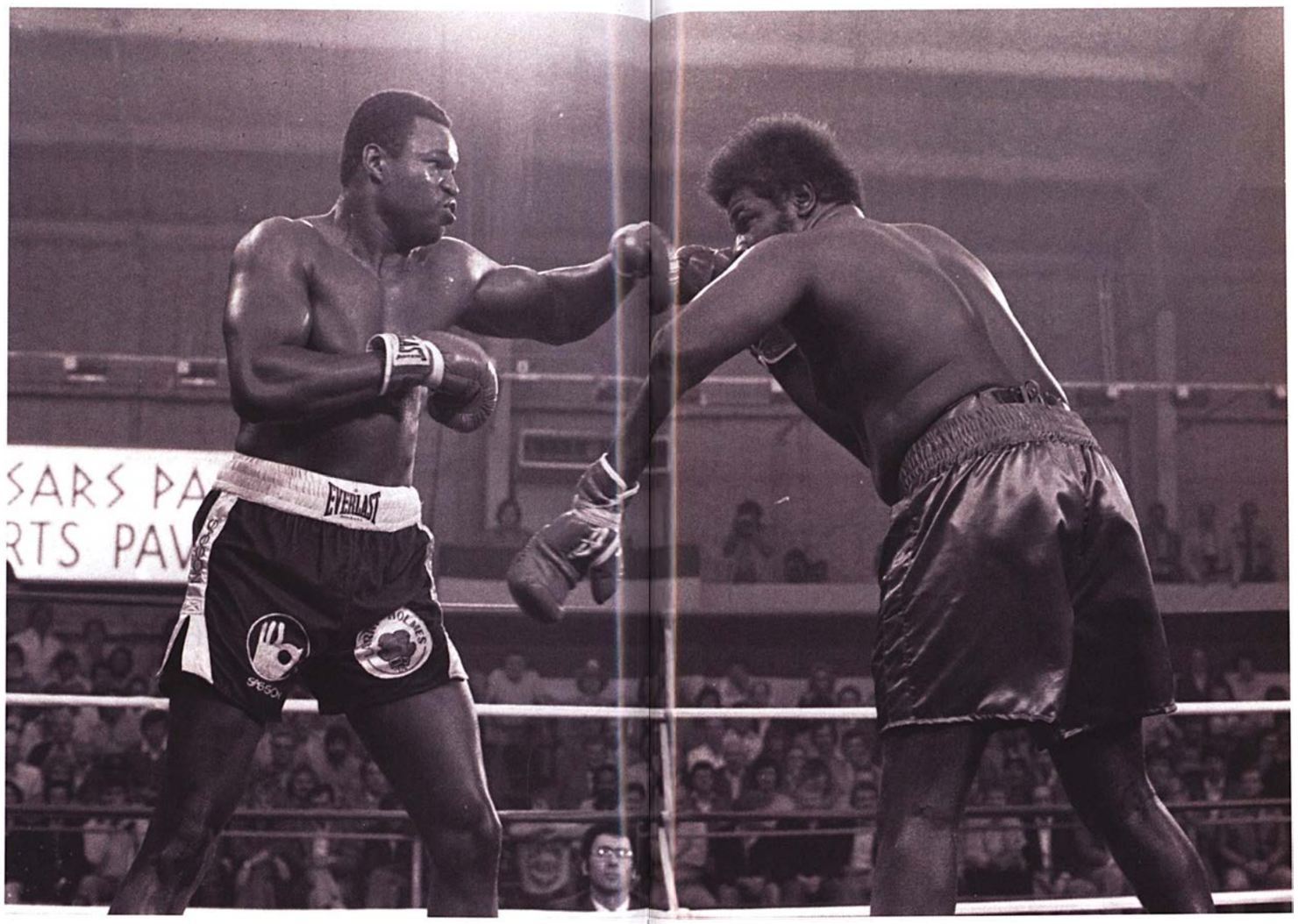
It didn't always take so many belts.

Boxing has always had pockets with fractured title scenes, but there was more consensus about the world champions in earlier eras.

The first title reign of Muhammad Ali was a sign of things to come. Ali was stripped of the WBA title twice in his first title reign. The Ring maintained recognition of Ali after 1967 despite his exile from boxing, while the WBA crowned Jimmy Ellis its champion and New York crowned Joe Frazier. The Ring recognized the winner of Frazier-Ellis in 1970 after Ali briefly retired.

The heavyweight title remained intact after that.

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE



Leroy Jones was Holmes' sixth defense and his sixth straight KO victim.

For a time.

The evolution of boxing's title scene as we know it today was already well under way. The WBC was born in 1963 and gradually began to separate from the WBA with its own champions and contenders. By the 1970s, the two-belt era had fully arrived.

Larry Holmes would benefit from it.

Leon Spinks upset Muhammad Ali for the championship in February 1978 and went straight into a rematch, ignoring the WBC's mandate that he face Ken Norton, who had won an eliminator versus Jimmy Young in 1977. The WBC thus gave the title to Norton and Holmes defeated him, though Spinks was widely recognized as the real champ.

Ali regained the honor from Spinks in their rematch while Holmes rose to No. 1 in The Ring's rankings through five defenses of the WBC title. The third of those defenses made all the difference for Holmes in assuming his place as the true king at heavyweight.

In the June 1980 issue of The Ring, the magazine elevated Holmes to champion not on the strength of his sixth title defense, against Leroy Jones, but on the results of the other big heavyweight fight on March 31, 1980.

That day, Mike Weaver knocked out John Tate for the WBA title. Holmes had stopped Weaver in his third defense of the WBC belt. And so it was written that, "With this issue *Ring* hereby recognizes Larry Holmes' claim as *the* Heavyweight Champion of the World. Not because he is the WBC claimant, but because he won his title *in the ring* with his victory last June 22nd over the WBA title claimant, Mike Weaver. That's where titles are won and lost - *in The Ring!*"

Later in 1980, Holmes would defeat Ali, history's previous champion, to further cement his hold on the throne. While Holmes never unified the WBA and WBC belts, he continued to run up his title defense totals under the WBC umbrella, including the high of winning one of the richest prizefights of all time in his 1982 victory over Gerry Cooney.

The in-ring experience for Holmes varied after Cooney. Randall "Tex" Cobb and Lucien Rodriguez were up next. Cobb was a decent fringe contender and lasted all 15 rounds, but their contest was a mismatch. The legacy of Holmes-Cobb is its impact outside the ring, as a catalyst for Howard Cossell's exit from calling professional fights.

Rodriguez would be the first defense of Holmes' career against a fighter not ranked in The Ring's top 10, and Holmes again went the distance, winning a 12-round shutout. It was followed by the longest night of the Holmes reign to that point.

On May 20, 1983, "Terrible" Tim Witherspoon, a veteran of just 15 professional contests, ran neck-and-neck with Holmes all night long.

Earnie Shavers and Renaldo Snipes had both hurt and dropped Holmes in title fights. Those were moments of high drama, but Holmes came back to win each by stoppage and was well ahead on points when he did. Witherspoon often outjabbed the master jabber, closed his left eye and built a lead before a rally from Holmes – and a little luck with the judges – saw the champion escape with a 12-round split decision. It was a bruising, classic affair that, according to Holmes, had him pondering retirement.

In his autobiography, *Against the Odds*, written with Phil Berger, Holmes stated that retirement thoughts "changed abruptly when a pair of promoters, Murad Muhammad and Bob Andreoli, offered me $5 million for a two-fight deal – Scott Frank and Marvis Frazier. That was, I thought, practically like white collar crime. Easy money. Found money."

Nothing is ever easy in boxing. Holmes, then 33, and promoter Don King had different interests. To get his "found money," Holmes wrote that "the hitch ... was convincing King to butt out so I could sock away these easy paydays without his getting a taste. What's more, I had promised King that I would fight another heavyweight of his, Greg Page. Both Page and King were concerned that at my age, who knows – maybe the worst would happen and either Frank or Frazier would knock me off."

Little did Holmes know that he was about to play a critical role in launching boxing's *three*-belt era.

Prior to 1983, the WBA and WBC were the only sanctioning organizations. Greg Page was the mandatory challenger for Holmes' WBC title. However, Holmes wanted more independence and didn't want to fight Page before easier money could be collected.

By the end of 1983, Holmes had changed allegiance from the WBC to the nascent IBF and boxing had three sanctioning bodies with their own heavyweight champ.

The Frank fight went forward and Holmes handled it with ease, stopping Frank in five lopsided rounds in September 1983. It would be Holmes' 16th and final defense of the WBC crown. Holmes was intent on taking the Frazier fight. It wasn't competitive on paper. Frazier was just 10-0 with wins over aged veteran Joe Bugner and fellow undefeated prospect James Broad to his credit. Any appeal was as a clash between Holmes and the son of former heavyweight champion Joe Frazier.

King and the WBC had other ideas.

Holmes recalled in *Against the Odds*:

A week before the Frazier fight, the WBC held its annual convention in Vegas, where Holmes-Frazier was to take place. Earlier, Sid Rogich, the WBC's VP, told me his championship committee would strip me of my title if I fought Frazier instead of taking my mandatory bout against Page. Rogich had once been the chairman of the Nevada boxing commission and was used to ramrodding his decisions through. Seemed to me he was still bugged about not being able to stop me from fighting the Frenchman, Rodriguez. And who knows? Maybe he was acting on the urging of Donald King. King and the WBC – hell, they were tighter than canned sardines. Anyway, I had hardly set my bags down in Vegas when here comes the little senor, [WBC head Jose] Sulaiman, to give me a lecture on ingratitude. All that the WBC had done for me ... why wasn't I grateful? I told him: "Jose, what about all I did for the WBC? What about my staying in it and being its champion all these years? And what about all the damn kickbacks I paid?" He said, real deadpan – as only Jose could – "Kickbacks? What's a kickback?" It was an Oscar-winning performance.

Holmes-Frazier went forward without the WBC belt on the line (though the Ring Magazine championship was). Holmes stopped Frazier in the first, notching another defense of history's crown. Pat Putnam reported in Sports Illustrated that "the attractiveness of the bout wasn't enriched when Jose Sulaiman, the generalissimo of the World Boxing Council, decreed that he would not recognize it as Holmes's 17th defense of his WBC title. It was rumored that Sulaiman would have sanctioned the fight if Frazier, should he have won, had given the option on his first title defense to promoter Don King. But since the rumor was vehemently denied by all parties involved, there's no sense in repeating it."

Reporting for The Washington Post, David Reminck wrote, "The bout was not sanctioned by the WBC, but the organization said it would have stripped Holmes of his title

had he lost ... Holmes, 34, who weighed in at 219 pounds, is unbeaten in 45 fights. He told the younger Frazier afterward, 'I don't want to do this any more.' Later, Holmes said he considered himself retired, 'until a better offer comes along.' Graciously, he said he would take $100 million to fight the World Boxing Association's champion, Gerrie Coetzee of South Africa."

Interviewed in the February 1984 issue of The Ring, King made his case about the Holmes-Page situation. Asked if he was willing to further delay Page's shot to make Holmes-Coetzee, King said no. "Had Larry Holmes come to me from the very beginning, and we had both made a deal with Page, before Scott Frank or Marvis Frazier, it would have been a different story. However, after Larry Holmes has defected, and fought Scott Frank, I think it's a disgrace to himself. The WBC title is what really made Larry Holmes, not Larry Holmes making the WBC title." King stated he would consider a unification showdown with Coetzee, whom King also had promotional ties to, after a Holmes defense against Page.

While the heavyweight drama was unfolding, a new player was born. When Bob Lee failed in a bid to become WBA president earlier in the year, he led a move to establish a new sanctioning body. In May, the newly formed USBA-International gave sanction to Marvin Hagler-Wilfred Scypion. By the end of the year, the USBA-I had rebranded and Lee and the IBF had another important champion in their fold.

On December 12, 1983, the Associated Press reported:

Larry Holmes resigned his World Boxing Council heavyweight title today and said he would fight as champion of the fledgling International Boxing Federation. The 34-year-old Holmes, who has been champion since 1978, made the announcement on the final day of the W.B.C.'s convention at Caesars Palace, and Jose Sulaiman, the council president, accepted the resignation. Holmes relinquished the title just as the W.B.C. was to approve a compromise that would have ordered arbitration to resolve Holmes's dispute with the promoter Don King over a mandatory defense against No. 1-ranked Greg Page. Sig Rogich, the council's vice president, said that Page would fight No. 2-ranked Tim Witherspoon for the vacant title. The fight is expected to be held Feb. 24 at a site to be determined.

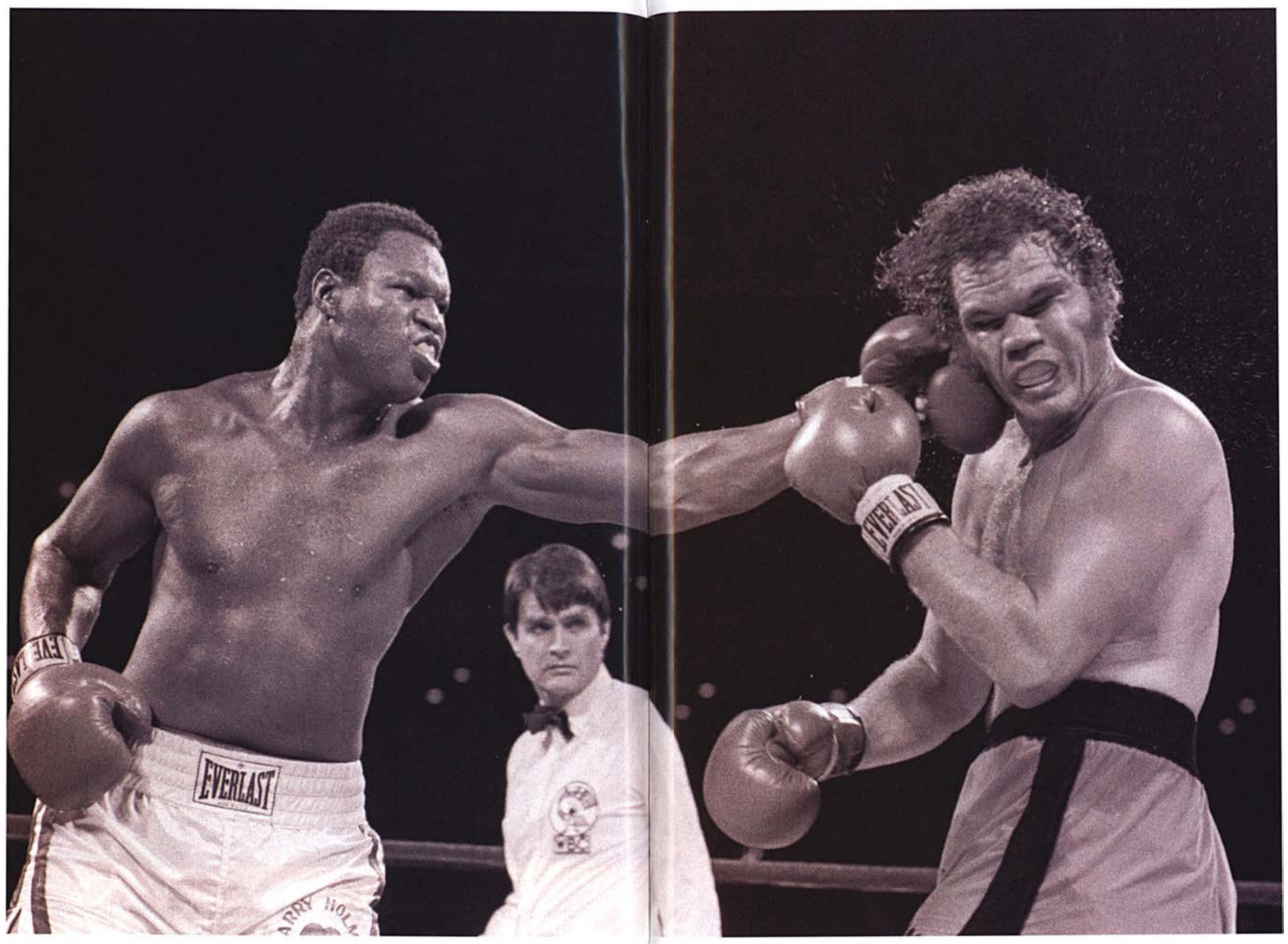
Just like that, two belts were three. Holmes recounted, "When I'd blown off the WBC, I'd approached the IBF about being its heavyweight champion. Quicker than you could say Sulaiman, the IBF agreed."

For the newborn sanctioning body, it was a coup. No matter what other belts were around, Larry Holmes was the recognized heavyweight king. It has been and always will be a special position in boxing. It's the zenith, the flagship position, of the sport. The IBF securing Holmes as their champion was a move toward fast credibility, and they wisely also married themselves to light heavyweight Michael Spinks, welterweight Donald Curry and junior welterweight Aaron Pryor as their inaugural champions in those weight classes.

Spinks and Hagler were already recognized as undisputed. Curry would go on to unify the division completely. Pryor was the recognized leader of his class before a brief sojourn from the sport.

Columnist Michael Katz addressed the various interests at play in the March 1984 issue of The Ring. Katz noted that Page was a worthy contender:

[Page] did not applaud Larry Holmes, nor condemn him, for doing what is best for Larry Holmes, even if it goes against the worthiest principles of the World Boxing Council constitution: Champions should and must defend their titles against the best challengers. Holmes instead told the WBC to take back its $1.99 belt. He will not defend it against the mandatory challenger, Greg Page, for the starvation wage of $2.5 million. At the age of 34, Larry has grown wise to the fact that $8 million buys more groceries than $2.5 million and is opting to arrange a bout with Gerrie Coetzee, the heavyweight champion of the world according to barf (also known as the World Boxing Association). So when a new WBC champion emerges from a bout between Page and Tim Witherspoon, then there will be three, Holmes having picked up the unnecessary sanctity of the International Boxing Federation.



BETTMANN

Randall "Tex" Cobb survived 15 rounds but absorbed terrible punishment for the privilege.

Holmes wouldn't defend the IBF title for almost a year. Coetzee never happened. Witherspoon beat Page for the vacant WBC belt in March 1984, then lost it to Pinklon Thomas in his first defense in August. Page, who followed his loss to Witherspoon with a loss to David Bey, knocked out Coetzee in December 1984 for the WBA strap just weeks after Holmes made his return.

On November 9, 1984, boxing was treated to the first heavyweight title bout of the three-belt era as Holmes overcame a cut and some stunning bombs, stopping James "Bonecrusher" Smith in 12 rounds to defend the IBF belt for the first time. King was there to promote it.

KO Magazine opened its coverage of the contest in the March 1985 issue with respect for the long tenure of Holmes:

In the long and sprawling novel that has been Larry Holmes' heavyweight championship reign, a predominant theme has emerged. When the undefeated titlist is retired or beaten or stripped of all world titles because of the length of his fights or the ranking of his opponents or the color of his trunks, some boxing fans will point to his two most important defenses, against Muhammad Ali and Gerry Cooney, and say, "Helluva fighter, helluva champ." But others, those who understand the fighter in the ring and the fight in the man, will point to Earnie Shavers, Mike Weaver, Renaldo Snipes, Tim Witherspoon, and Bonecrusher Smith. Against each of those challengers, a fighter who turned pro with the reputation of a quitter was weakened and tested in a way all champions must eventually be tested. In all of those struggles, Holmes' title belt began to stretch from his corner diagonally across the ring. But it never snapped. Each time, Larry Holmes was one punch away from the end. We're still waiting for that one punch to land. The matter of when it does is what the conclusion of the novel is all about.

At the dawn of the three-belt era, the Holmes novel was just pages away from matching Rocky Marciano's mark of 49-0.

IN WHAT WAS SEEN AS A FORGONE CONCLUSION EN ROUTE TO MAKING HISTORY, **HOLMES** TOOK ON SMALLER CHALLENGER **MICHAEL SPINKS** – BUT "JINX" WOULD PROVE TO BE MORE THAN JUST A NICKNAME

By Nigel Collins

END OF AN ERA

Spinks' awkwardness and ring savvy troubled the aging champion.

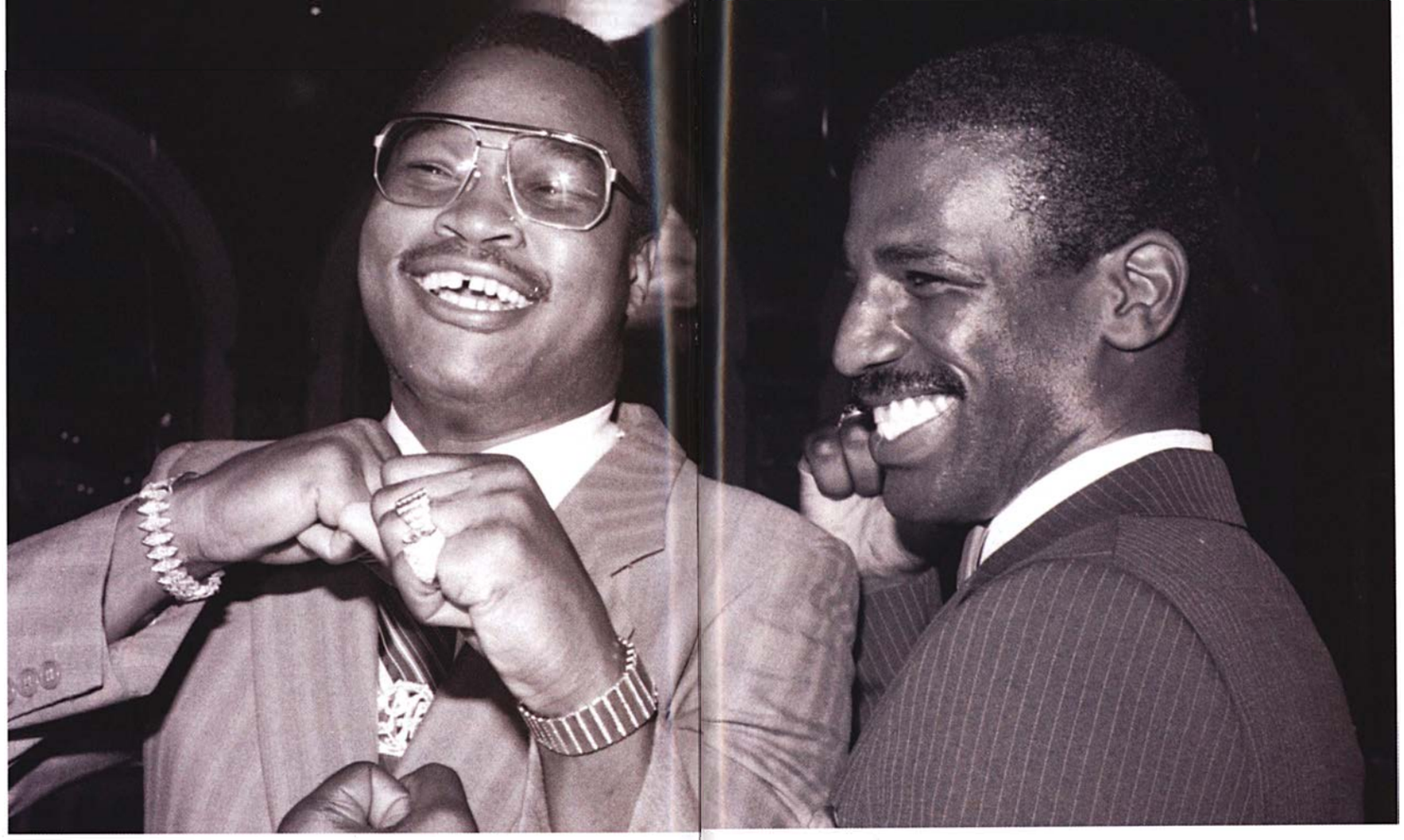
BOB RIHA JR

Any telling of the Larry Holmes saga must eventually deal with the sticky topic of his two championship bouts with Michael Spinks. The difference between the fighters on those nights was one of perception and possibly the misunderstanding of an old story.

One would have thought the tiresome "a good big man always beats a good little man" fallacy would have been dead and buried after David whacked Goliath. If not, then certainly when Tyrion Lannister led the charge at the Battle of the Blackwater.

Nonetheless, the announcement that heavyweight champion Larry Holmes would be defending against light heavyweight champion Michael Spinks on September 21, 1985, was met with a mixture of suspicion and curiosity.

Suspicion because over the decades, five reigning light heavyweight champs had the opportunity to win the big one. They probably figured at worst it would be a nice payday, which was how it usually turned out. Until Spinks, they all lost, one of them twice.



Curiosity? There's always a first time.

But how do you buck such momentum, especially when the weight of history is on the champ's side? After all, the first million-dollar gate pitted heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey against light heavyweight champion Georges Carpentier. The "Manassa Mauler" vs. the "Orchid Man." How could it have been anything other than a mismatch? It looked like a jackhammer vs. a garden rake. The Frenchman lasted less than four rounds. They say promoter Tex Rickard made more than half a million dollars profit.

Why should Holmes-Spinks be different? What did the pundits and oddsmakers miss going into the fight? Did the right guy get the decision?

Holmes had been champion since June 9, 1978, when he beat Ken Norton by 15-round split decision in a mind-blowing orgy of heavyweight ferocity. After 20 successful defenses, Larry was a wealthy man, respected by all, a true champion. He was also almost 36 years of age, and his body was beginning to fall apart, as bodies do.

Holmes was looking for a viable challenger who wasn't going to give him too much trouble. Which is what Muhammad Ali tried to do when he chose Michael's brother, Leon, as his challenger and ended up an ex-champ. Coincidence? A double Spinks Jinx?

In Holmes' most recent fight prior to Spinks, he won a unanimous decision over Carl "The Truth" Williams in Reno on May 20, 1985. Williams gave Holmes a competitive fight. Both were hurt at various times, and trainer Eddie Futch said, "That's the most punishment Larry's taken since I've been with him."

People assumed "The Easton Assassin" was joking when he said, "I'm only interested in fighting little guys." But he wasn't. He made it clear that the only thing that would prevent him from retiring was a fight with Michael Spinks. Was it a bluff? Probably, but it worked anyway,

The majority figured Spinks would suffer the same fate as the previous hopefuls. The Nevada sportsbooks felt the same way. Holmes was a 6-1 favorite when the first bell rang. There were, however, outliers who dared to differ.

In the August 1985 issue of The Ring, Joseph Dobrian offered a contrary take altogether in his article "Let Us Now Praise Little Men: How Michael Spinks Can Beat Larry Holmes." In it, Dobrian laid out a three-part plan that would later prove prescient.

"In most cases, a fight between two men of different weights will be decided by the same factors that decide any other fight: style, ability and desire," wrote Dobrian.

In his book David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants, Malcolm Gladwell takes a deeper look into the topic by dissecting what is probably the world's most famous upset, ultimately showing us why it really wasn't an upset after all.

"Most people get this famous Biblical yarn all wrong because they misunderstand who really has the upper hand," Gladwell wrote. "It is because of, and not despite, David's size and unorthodox choice of weapon that he is able to slay the lumbering giant. Most people underestimate the importance of agility and speed. Knowing that Goliath is slow and encumbered not only by his own weight, but by his armor, David is confident that the giant won't be able to react to the approaching projectile."

In order to improve on his smaller-man advantages and add a few pounds in a scientific manner, Spinks hired New Orleans sports nutritionist Mackie Shilstone, who helped him enter the ring at 200 pounds without the extra weight slowing him down.

A capacity crowd of 11,192 at the Riviera Hotel & Casino's Outdoor Arena gave both Holmes and Spinks a rousing cheer when they were introduced by ring announcer Chuck Hull. It was a chilly night, but the audience was fired up, looking forward to what turned out to be a historic event.

Much of the fight resembled a bull chasing a scarecrow that was being buffeted this way and that by a swirling wind. Every now and then, a powerful gust sent the stick figure flying at its antagonist, only to be quickly pulled back by a vortex of caution.

Spinks' awkward style had always been an asset, but against Holmes he took it to a super-spastic level, swaying his upper body one way and shifting his legs another. He ducked and dodged and never stopped moving until he plopped down on his stool between rounds.

"I wanted to mesmerize and hypnotize Larry with my movements," Spinks said. "It worked. I know it bothered him. He thought I was having an athletic fit."

Watching the fight again, Spinks reminded me of Emanuel Augustus, the beloved "Drunken Master." The difference was that Augustus' shtick was part of his singular gift, while Spinks was fighting scared, as he should, scrambling any way he could to avoid Holmes' power punches.

Old warhorse Holmes never stopped stalking behind his celebrated left jab, looking for an opportunity to land his right, which he did from time to time. Spinks relied on his helter-skelter assaults, periodically launching himself at Holmes like a drowning man reaching for a life preserver.

There was little to choose between Spinks' firecracker flurries and Holmes' percussive right hands and face-twisting jabs. Larry landed solid rights in several rounds, but it was a right to the body in the ninth that visibly hurt Spinks and triggered "Lareee, Lareee" chants from the audience.

You could see Holmes grow older in front of your eyes, round after round. He was fighting Father Time, Spinks, fatigue and a bum shoulder, but remained stoic and stubborn. He couldn't do what he used to do, but did his best with what he had left – and it damn near worked.

Spinks won because of greater activity. He threw and landed considerably more punches than Holmes, and judging by Larry's swollen face, not all of them were love taps.

It was hard to argue with the official scores of 145-142 (Larry Wallace), 143-142 (Harold Lederman) and 143-142 (Dave Moretti), all in Spinks' favor. It was a very close fight with many close rounds and, as is usually the case in such squeakers, the loser is sure he won.

"I feel I won the fight, and I know this time I'm getting some respect," said Holmes. "Because as I left the ring, people were saying to me: 'They really screwed you, Larry.'"

Shortly thereafter, Larry screwed himself.

The backstory to the fight was that with a victory over Spinks, Holmes would have equaled Rocky Marciano's 49 straight victories. There were already plans for the next fight, in which Holmes would endeavor to surpass Marciano, and he stood to make substantially more than the $3.5 million he received for facing Spinks.

Members of Marciano's family were on hand during fight week, which didn't sit particularly well with Holmes, especially when he heard Rocky's brother, Peter, was allegedly dissing him. Once Larry got going on the topic at the post-fight press conference, he went all-in. He had a lot to say, much of it valid.

But when he said, "If you want to get technical about it, Rocky couldn't carry my jockstrap," white people freaked out.

Marciano wasn't alive to defend himself, but if he were I'm pretty sure Rocky would have laughed it off. After all, the verdict stopped Holmes' unbeaten streak at 48, forever one win behind Marciano.

The controversy and narrow decision created an appetite for a rematch, and while Holmes said he was retiring in the immediate aftermath, two weeks later he

changed his mind. "My pride is involved," he said. "I know I can beat Michael Spinks."

As soon as the rematch was announced, Holmes was installed as the favorite by Nevada's sportsbooks. The fight took place at the Las Vegas Hilton Center on April 19, 1986, in front of a full house of 8,328 and HBO's TV audience.

Shortly before the second fight, Holmes, never one to hold his tongue, said the judges "must have been drunk" when they scored his first fight with Spinks. He was forced to apologize to the Nevada State Athletic Commission prior to the fight, but his words were probably still ringing in the judges' ears as they took their seats ringside.

"Holmes took a four-point lead in the first four rounds, throwing more combinations in that span than he did the entire first fight when his reflexes betrayed the old champ from the first bell," wrote Jack Welsh, The Ring's Las Vegas correspondent.

The second fight was considerably more entertaining than the first. Spinks began to punch back in the fifth and had some excellent rounds, notably the 10th, when Michael dominated with combinations to both the head and body. He outpunched Holmes in a bristling exchange and capped the round with a jarring right to the head. The closest either came to scoring a knockdown was when Holmes discombobulated Spinks with a right to the head in Round 14.

"The champ suddenly found himself buckling into a crablike position, just managing to retain precarious balance with his gloves inches off the canvas," wrote Welsh. "Once erect, a glassy-eyed Spinks was able to lurch out of harm's way, an impossible task against Holmes even two years ago."

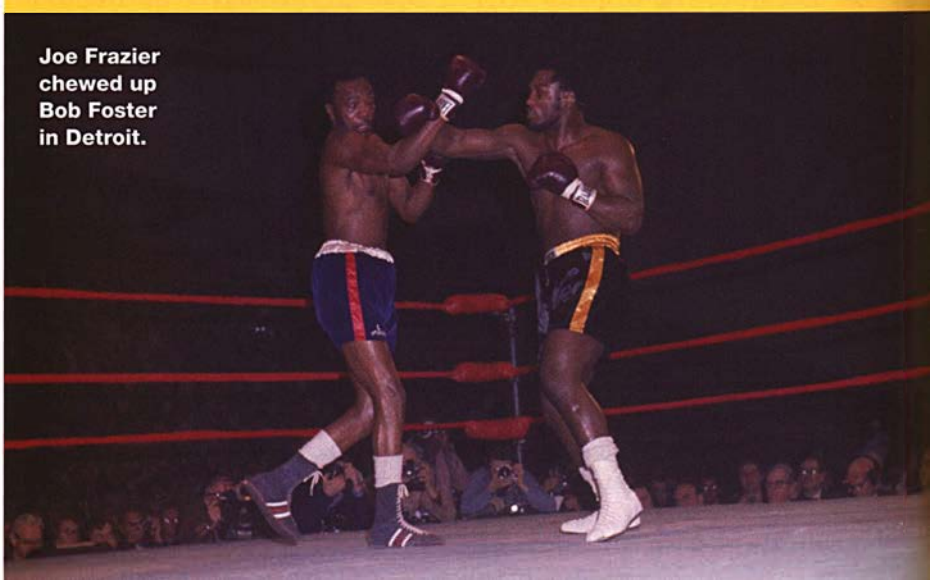
The HBO broadcast team, including the network's unofficial scorekeeper, Harold Lederman (one of the three judges in the first fight), and 42 of 46 ringside writers all had Holmes winning. Two of the official judges disagreed, handing in tallies of

THE NOT-SO-MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

There have been seven attempts by six reigning light heavyweight champions to win the true heavyweight title. To date, only Michael Spinks has been successful. Here are the boxers who qualified, tried and failed. Others with ambiguous claims are dealt with in the "Less Entitled" sidebar.

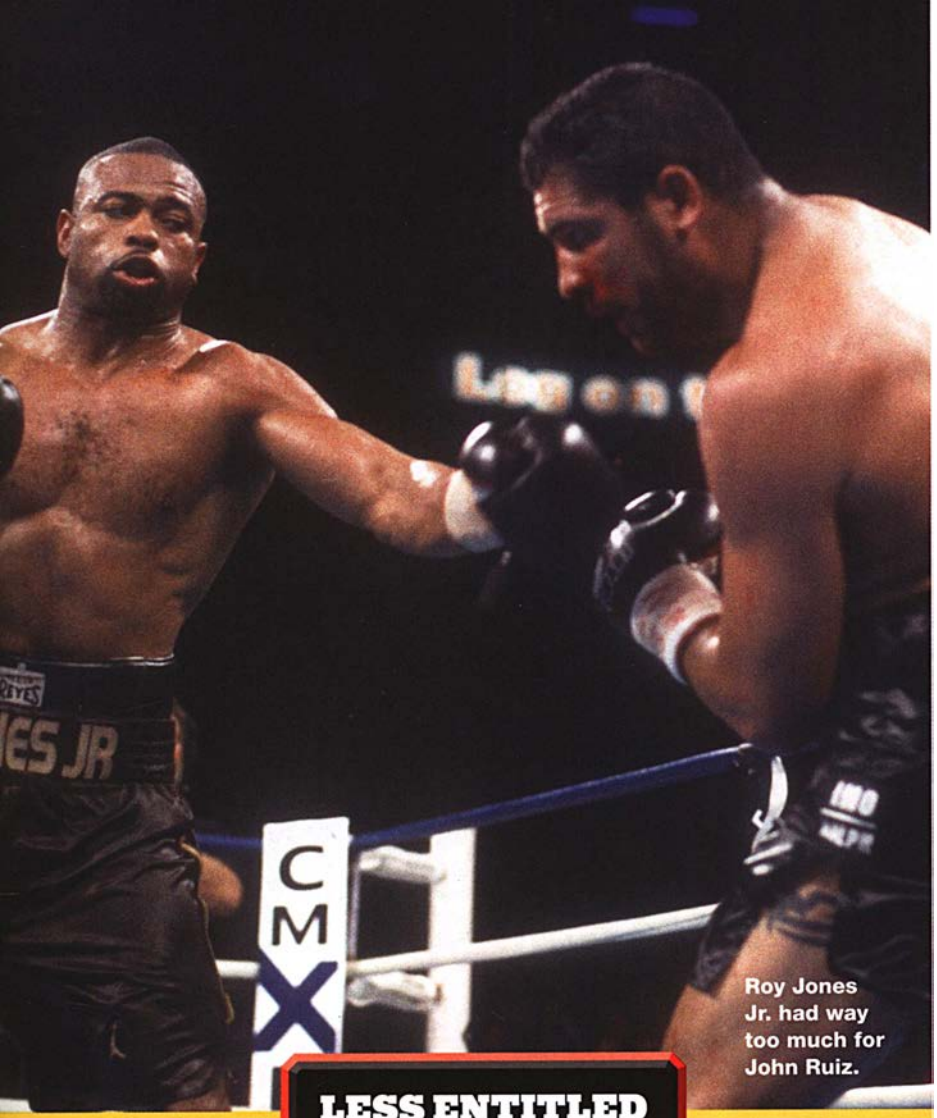
- Frenchman Georges Carpentier, a handsome, debonair boulevardier with a fluid boxing style that was an extension of his boyhood study of Savate, the French brand of kickboxing. None of that would help him when he faced world champion Jack Dempsey on July 2, 1921. After a good start, Carpentier was knocked down twice by the "Manassa Mauler" in the fourth round. The second time, he didn't get up.
- On January 25, 1939, John Henry Lewis, who had held the light heavyweight title since 1935, challenged his friend Joe Louis, who knew Lewis had eye problems. "When I went in the ring that night, I remember thinking to myself, 'I'm not going to punish John, I'm gonna try to get this over with in a hurry,'" wrote Louis in his 1978 autobiography, Joe Louis: My Life. "I knocked him down three times in the first round … Arthur Donovan, the referee, stopped the fight."
- The next to give it a go was Joey Maxim, who challenged Ezzard Charles in Chicago on May 30, 1951. This was the fourth of five matches between them, and the only title fight. Charles gave Maxim the beating of his career on his way to a unanimous decision. But repeated clinches by the shopworn cutie took the fun out of the fight.
- When light heavyweight champion Archie Moore's lengthy campaign to get a crack at Rocky Marciano finally paid off, a crowd of 61,574 turned up at Yankee Stadium, September 21, 1955, to see what the "Old Mongoose" could do with the "Brockton Blockbuster." He dropped Marciano with a sweet counter right to the chin in the second, but Rocky was up quickly. Archie was knocked down four times before being counted out in the ninth round.
- Moore tried again on November 30, 1956, getting stopped in five rounds by Floyd Patterson for the vacant title.
- Light heavyweight champion Bob Foster never had much luck against heavyweights. Though his punching power was responsible for 11 knockouts in 13 light heavyweight title fights, it didn't have the same effect on heavyweights. His heavyweight title try came against a peak Joe Frazier on November 18, 1970. "Smokin' Joe" landed two perfect left hooks on his challenger's chin in the second round. The first put him down and the second put him out, 49 seconds into the round.

– Nigel Collins



Joe Frazier chewed up Bob Foster in Detroit.

BETTMANN



Roy Jones Jr. had way too much for John Ruiz.

LESS ENTITLED

Six former light heavyweight champs who challenged reigning heavyweight champions and titleholders with varying degrees of success.

- Bob Fitzsimmons had already won and lost the heavyweight championship when he decisioned George Gardner on November 25, 1903, for the light heavyweight belt.
- Gene Tunney fought as a light heavyweight for much of his career, and although he was the American light heavyweight titleholder, he was never world champion at 175 pounds. Jack Delany was light heavy champ when Tunney upset Jack Dempsey.
- Gus Lesnevich was past his prime and had lost the light heavyweight title to Freddie Mills when heavyweight champ Ezzard Charles stopped him at the end of the seventh round on August 10, 1949. It was Lesnevich's final fight.
- Billy Conn had relinquished the light heavyweight title before his first KO loss to Joe Louis on June 18, 1941.
- Michael Moorer had not fought as a light heavyweight since 1990 when he TKO'd Bert Cooper for the vacant WBO heavyweight title on May 15, 1992. Evander Holyfield was the legit heavyweight champion on that date. Moorer outpointed Holyfield for the WBA and IBF heavyweight titles in 1994.
- Roy Jones Jr. was light heavyweight champion when he outpointed WBA heavyweight beltholder John Ruiz on March 1, 2003. Although he would retire soon, Lennox Lewis was still the genuine heavyweight champion when Jones beat Ruiz.

– Nigel Collins

144-141 (Frank Brunette) and 144-142 (Jerry Roth) for Spinks, while Joe Cortez scored it for Holmes, 144-141.

When the decision went against him, Holmes turned to trainer Richie Giachetti and said, "Oh, no, I've got a big mouth."

Had his "drunken judges" comment backfired in the worst way?

Larry Holmes was a little brusque at first, but staff photographer Bill Apter, a natural-born clown, soon had Larry laughing at his Bruno Sammartino impression. It's a surefire icebreaker. You might be surprised how many boxers enjoy WWE-style wrestling, a sentimental remnant of a boyhood well-spent.

We were sitting in Holmes' penthouse office in Easton, Pennsylvania, looking out a huge window at the confluence of the Lehigh and Delaware rivers. It's quite a sight, and Larry has the best view in town. The champ had to spend his own money to erect the building upon which his office rested. He was both proud of his accomplishment and pissed that no bank would give him a loan, not even the one that rented the first floor from him. It's an example of the duality of his life and has, to a significant degree, shaped his attitude toward boxing and most everything else.

At the time of our visit, it had been almost 10 years since Holmes lost the heavyweight championship to Michael Spinks, and Larry was still fighting, his name recognizable enough to make it worthwhile. That's why he had recently signed to fight WBC titleholder Oliver McCall. A good payday and a chance to regain at least a piece of something he never believed he should have lost.

It was the scheduled McCall fight that got us out of the editorial office for the day, but in the course of our conversation it was inevitable that Holmes' two fights with Spinks would crop up. Larry dismissed the topic with a get-out-of-here hand gesture.

"I won both fights," he said. "You guys know that."

THE ENCORE

A LOSS TO **MIKE TYSON** SEEMED LIKE THE END OF THE STORY, BUT HOLMES WOULD RETURN AFTER A THREE-YEAR BREAK TO BEGIN THE FINAL CHAPTER OF HIS CAREER

By Don Stradley

When he fell for the third time that night in Atlantic City, Larry Holmes was done.

Mike Tyson had scored a fourth-round stoppage. If the sight of Holmes on the canvas wasn't a clear enough message for the audience, there was referee Joe Cortez swooping in to wave the contest off. The ending had been dramatic, the gallant Holmes trying to withstand a younger man's speed and power, trying to summon the old magic one last time.

Holmes wound up on his back, yelling at his corner men to come help him up.

Later on, Holmes mentioned the loss in a memoir co-written with journalist Phil Berger. He admitted he had taken the contest on short notice and was in no way ready to face a youthful beast such as Tyson. Holmes actually considered canceling the bout:

"As I neared the ring, I had this weird thought: Why not be the first fighter to refuse to go into the ring? All those people watching on HBO, I'll amaze all of them. I'll tell the announcer, 'I swear I'll fight Tyson next month, right after I have a tune-up. Just not tonight.'"

Of course, Holmes put aside his unease and gave Tyson a few good rounds. At times he even appeared to be controlling the pace and tone of the fight. But once the bombs started landing in the vicinity of his head and chin, the reality of the situation was visible to all.

In the past, Holmes had been able to shake off the effects of punches. Not now, though. It was 1988 and he was pushing 40. He'd come back for the money being offered, a cool $3 million or so. He had plans to buy up some real estate, and there was no quicker way to make a big wad of money than by fighting Tyson. But Tyson did what young champions are supposed to do. He took the fight to the older man and overwhelmed him.

There wasn't a writer at ringside not reaching back for references and comparisons. They couldn't wait to link this bout to Holmes' own treatment of Muhammad Ali back in 1980, or Rocky Marciano's dismantling of Joe Louis

Above: A 38-year-old, ring-rusty Holmes was outgunned by the savagery of Mike Tyson in their 1988 clash.

a few decades before that. A younger, faster lion always displaces the old lion. That's the law of the jungle, and the law of boxing.

"I hated the way I lost against Spinks," Holmes had said earlier in the week. "Win 48 and then lose two like that. That's why I came back. One way or the other, this time I will retire at peace with myself, and with honor."

But despite the apparent finality of his loss to Tyson, Holmes wasn't really done. Tyson had merely retired the first version of Holmes. In three years, a different Holmes would emerge, a grizzled character with enough savvy to beat most of the competition being offered. Holmes' eventual return to boxing didn't make as many headlines as the comeback of George Foreman at roughly the same time period, but it was remarkable in its own way. In fact, it was one of the longest and most fascinating comebacks in the history of the business.

FEB. 7, 1992, ATLANTIC CITY
RAY MERCER

Fans feared for Holmes' safety when he signed to fight Mercer. Though Mercer wasn't precisely in Tyson's league, he was a young powerhouse on his way to a title shot against reigning champion Evander Holyfield. Holmes was being used as a kind of marketing tool, a way for Mercer to add a famous name to his resume.

By the time it was over, Holmes had earned a unanimous 12-round decision by scores of 117-112, 117-111 and 115-113. This was not just a great moment in Holmes' later years but one of his best performances, period.

The Convention Center crowd had jeered Holmes as he entered the ring, for he seemed just another greedy old boxer going for the quick money grab. Indeed, he seemed clumsy in the first round, knocked unsteady by one of Mercer's punches.

"He scared the heck out of me," Holmes told the United Press. "He caught me off-balance, he hit me and he hurt me. But the oldness in me said, 'No, you ain't gonna fall.'"

The 42-year-old needed a few rounds to find his rhythm and start boxing. The old jab was still there, and if the old right hand was no longer a lightning bolt, it was still good enough to score points. By the middle rounds, Holmes was consistently beating Mercer to the punch. As Holmes ruined Mercer's plans, the customers began cheering for him; they knew they were seeing something special.

At times Holmes even taunted Mercer, luring him in only to potshot him with a quick right. When he needed a breather he'd lay on the ropes, timing Mercer with sharp counters. By the fight's end,

Holmes' ring craft and cunning bewildered hot-favorite Ray Mercer.

THE RING MAGAZINE

A peak version of Evander Holyfield was made to work hard for victory.

Mercer was bleeding from the nose, reconciled to defeat. Holmes had thoroughly outclassed him.

The surprising outcome can't really be appreciated today, but at the time, Mercer was a terror. In beating him, Holmes rejuvenated his career. Later on, it was revealed that Holmes had suffered a detached retina before the bout and was fighting with the handicap of partial vision. But nothing deterred him, not his eye and not Mercer.

"It's like a new day," Holmes said at the post-fight press conference. He assured reporters that he was about to go to his hotel room and "cry like hell."

JUNE 19, 1992, LAS VEGAS
EVANDER HOLYFIELD

The title shot that would've been Mercer's was granted to Holmes. The fight attracted a lot of cynicism, what with the aging Holmes competing for the title again, but he entered the contest as a sentimental favorite and was wily enough to go the 12-round distance without getting hurt. Unfortunately, Holyfield beat him by scores of 116-112 (twice) and 117-111.

The fight wasn't especially action-packed, but connoisseurs of boxing might've appreciated Holmes' exhibition of sheer guile. The New York Times described Holmes as something like a "junkball pitcher, using his art to keep Holyfield constantly off-balance and unable to dig his heels in and turn the match into the brawl he wanted."

Holmes may have been an old junkballer, but he could still let the fastball rip. He landed some punches squarely on Holyfield's jaw, snapped his head back a few times with uppercuts and occasionally connected with a vintage Larry Holmes left-right combination. At one point, he even took a moment to mock Holyfield's trainer, Lou Duva. He appeared to fade in the later part of the bout, though fans chanted "Larry! Larry!" He didn't win the championship, but Holmes certainly won the crowd. If nothing else, Holmes was the first opponent to ever cut Holyfield.

At 42, Holmes was at that time the second-oldest fighter to challenge for a title, only four months younger than Archie Moore had been when he'd challenged heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson in 1956. But what Holmes had in experience and cunning, he lacked in mobility. Hence, he was forced to do a lot of mauling and wrestling, which had never been his forte. A younger Holmes with more spring in his legs would've given Holyfield a much different fight.

Holmes complimented Holyfield as "a great champion and a tough fighter" and took home $7 million for his trouble. Asked if he would've done anything differently, Holmes was succinct.

"I would've fought him in 1980."

Oliver McCall barely edged a 45-year-old version of The Easton Assassin.

APRIL 8, 1995, LAS VEGAS
OLIVER MCCALL

The problem with the second part of Holmes' career was that he was still capable of beating a lot of opponents but struggled against the top-level fighters. In 1995, at age 45, he lost a close but unanimous decision to WBC titleholder Oliver McCall by scores of 114-113, 115-114 and 115-112.

"Larry Holmes came to fight; he fought his heart out," McCall said afterward.

For the first six rounds, Holmes appeared to be on his way to scoring an upset. He did so well that promoter Don King was heard bellowing to McCall after the sixth, "You'd better not blow this fight, brother!"

McCall, a strong but erratic character, needed a big finish to salvage the bout and retain the title.

Sporting a gash on his cheek, a tired Holmes announced his retirement after the bout. "This is a good fight for me to go out on," he said.

He was back five months later to win a 10-round unanimous decision over Ed Donaldson at Casino Magic in St. Louis. He'd nearly knocked Donaldson out in the ninth, proving he still had something left.

JAN. 24, 1997, COPENHAGEN
BRIAN NIELSEN

Victories over Donaldson, Curtis Shepard, Quinn Navarre and Anthony Willis landed the 47-year-old Holmes in Denmark to face that country's most popular fighter, Brian Nielsen. Fighting outside of America for one of the rare times in his career, Holmes did well. The United Press reported that he put on "a faultless display of relaxed boxing" and had Nielsen "in a bruised and weary state when the final bell sounded." Yet when the scorecards were turned in, he had lost by a split decision.

"Why do they do this to me?" Holmes said. "I'm a nice guy."

Nielsen was a ponderous, uninspired fighter, but he'd been a silver medalist at the 1992 Olympics and now possessed the lightly regarded IBO heavyweight title belt as well as backing from a major right-wing political organization. Despite his high profile, though, his fights were occasionally surrounded by an unbearable stench. Other American opponents who had traveled to Denmark complained of questionable scorecards, bribe offers, and even being drugged before facing Nielsen. The unpopular decision over Holmes added to Nielsen's dubious mystique.

Holmes was still serving the same purpose he had served for Tyson, Mercer, McCall and others; he was a name, and not expected to win. Yet he bloodied Nielsen's nose and did enough to convince one judge (and many onlookers) that he deserved the victory.

After the bout, Holmes claimed that someone had tried to poison him in a restaurant, and that teenage prostitutes had been sent to his hotel room. Though he threatened to have the bout investigated, he took the loss with more good cheer than usual. "I knew he'd never hurt me and I just wanted to feather my nest some more," he said.

There were two themes during Holmes' extended late career run. On one hand, he was blunt about his reasons for fighting: It was the best way he knew to make money, and he looked at it as a sort of well-paying pastime. "I like fighting for money," he said. "Some people golf. This is my hobby."

But there was an underlying reason for his continued comeback. He'd always felt underappreciated by fans and the media, and now, more often than not, he was hearing cheers. The pressure was off, too. He was no longer the man who had usurped the more popular Ali. Now Holmes was, in his own words, an overweight grandpa just trying to earn some cash. For the first time in his long career, he was having fun.

And a few opponents remained.

First, he squeaked by Maurice Harris, winning a split decision in New York. Then he revisited a couple of his former rivals, "Bonecrusher" Smith and Mike Weaver, in Southern locales. Those two bouts weren't pretty, but Holmes won both by knockout.

Then it was time for Larry's farewell. He had hoped for a big payday against Foreman but settled for the man known as "Butterbean."

HOLLY STEIN

JULY 27, 2002, NORFOLK, VA.
ERIC "BUTTERBEAN" ESCH

Some were disappointed that Holmes, at 52, finished out his career against the comical Eric Esch. Holmes did just enough to win a unanimous 10-round decision, but aside from a moment in the final round when he stumbled to the canvas, the bout was forgettable.

Esch, the 330-pound so-called "King of the Four-Rounders," did little more than stand in front of Holmes and take punches to his bulbous head. The only drama was in wondering if Esch might get lucky and land one of his winging punches. Esch may have been a novelty act, but he was a strong man and could hurt you. Still, even at 52, Holmes was too smart to get caught by such a crude slugger as Esch.

For some, it was nice to see Holmes one last time. For others, it was an embarrassing night for boxing.

Was it a sideshow? Indeed it was, but for Holmes that was part of the point.

"I've made a lot of people a lot of money in my 33 years of boxing," he said. "Don King, Bob Arum and other promoters benefited from me. But these guys didn't have the guts to send me off properly in my last fight."

With no one offering Holmes the red carpet treatment, he agreed to fight Esch for $250,000 in Norfolk, Virginia. Novice promoter Daryl DeCroix even arranged to get the fight on pay-per-view.

Prior to the bout, which was attended by just short of 8,000 people, Holmes was his old irascible self, complaining that he was overlooked and disrespected by the boxing world. It was the same old song he'd been singing for years.

After the bout, Holmes teased that he might come back for someone easier than Butterbean, but he was joking. He knew the end had finally arrived. There'd been some cheering for Holmes during the bout, but there was also booing. If he'd been dreaming of the day when he'd be fully appreciated, this wouldn't be it. And though he won easily, smashing his old hands against Butterbean's concrete skull for 10 rounds probably wasn't much fun.

But who would've imagined that after the loss to Tyson he would continue boxing for another 14 years? Holmes' record during this second leg of his career was 21-3. For some fighters, that would be a career in itself. For Holmes, it was just a prolonged victory lap.

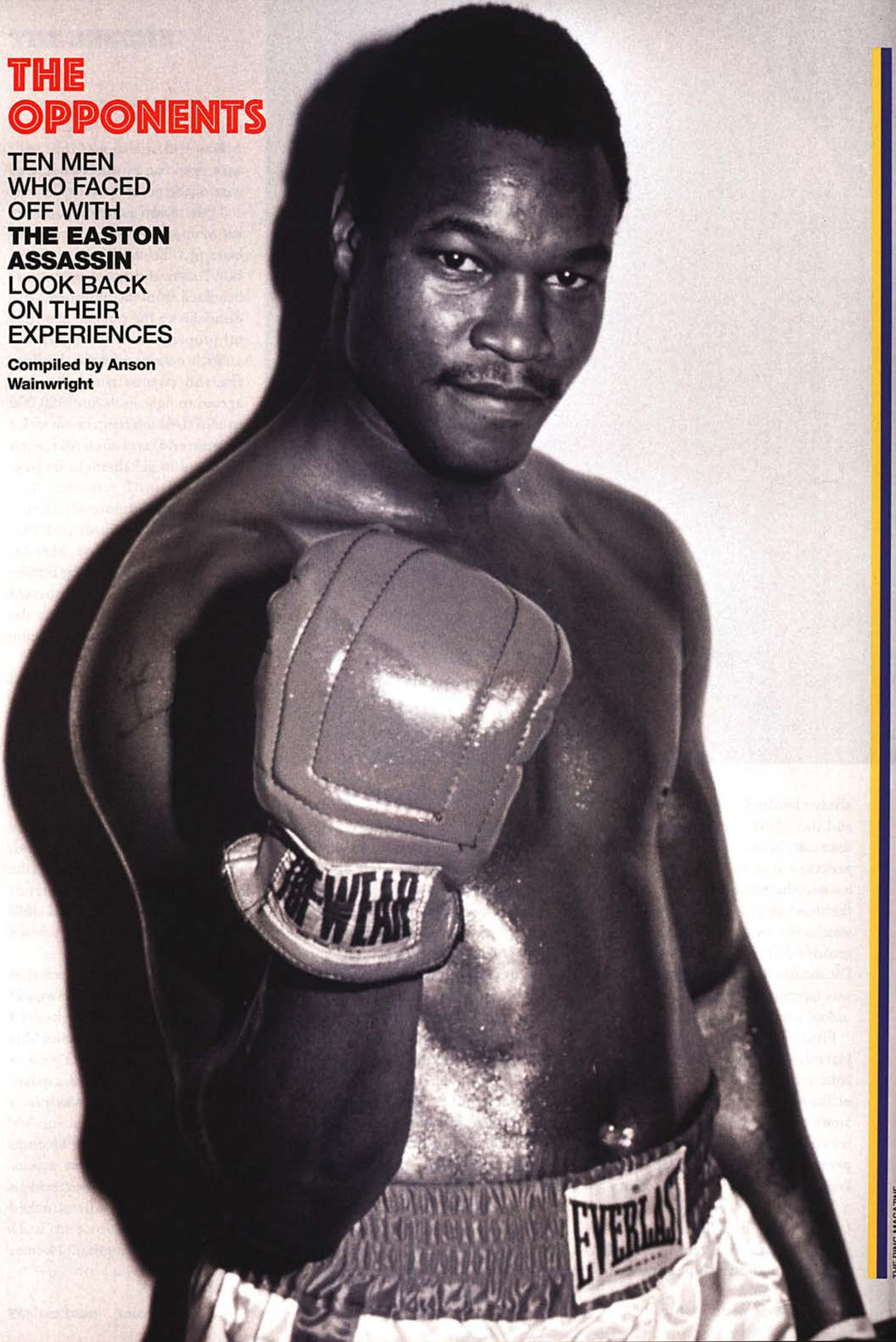
It was no surprise that Holmes announced his retirement again. This time he meant it. Butterbean would be the last man he punched for money.

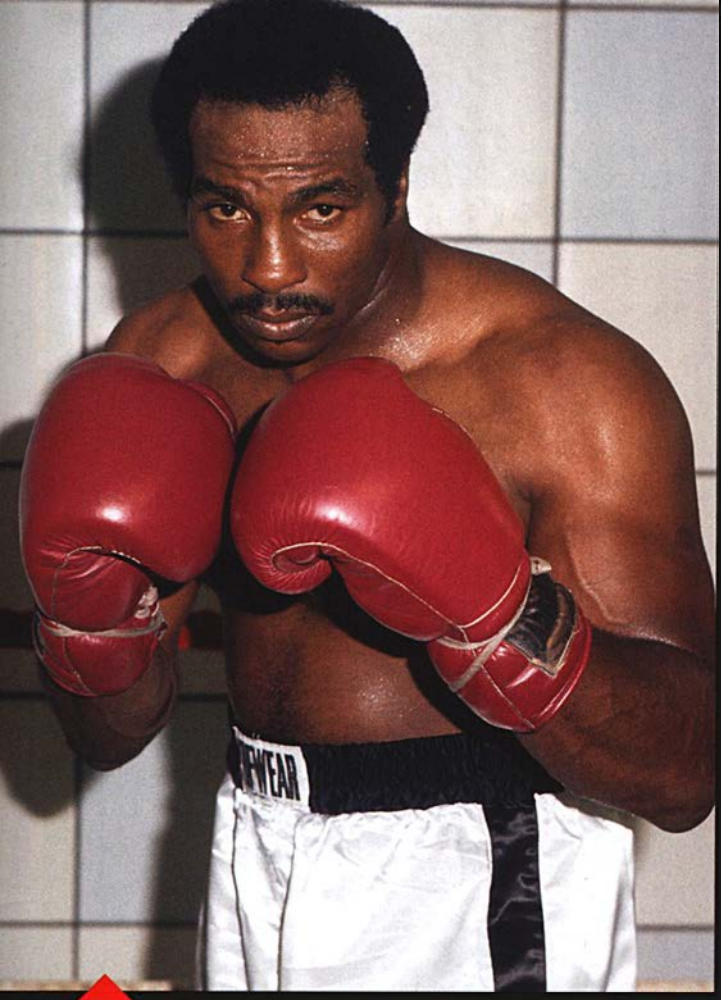
"The fat lady is singing," Holmes said. "I'm out."

THE OPPONENTS

TEN MEN WHO FACED OFF WITH **THE EASTON ASSASSIN** LOOK BACK ON THEIR EXPERIENCES

Compiled by Anson Wainwright





ALFREDO EVANGELISTA

NOVEMBER 10, 1978, CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS • TITLES: WBC • RESULT: HOLMES KO 7

"I was training in Los Angeles with Roberto Duran. Roberto was recording the famous scene in Rocky II when we see a jacuzzi. This was the first time in my life that I had seen one. (laughs) I didn't take the correct measures after the bath and was very sick. I shouldn't have fought against Holmes. I was very sick with otitis (an ear infection), taking pills and antibiotics.

"We call Don King (the promoter) a week before the fight and he told me in a threatening voice, 'If you don't fight against Holmes, you never will fight again for a world title.' What could I do? Holmes beat me. I could fight the early rounds, but in the seventh I was dead [and was stopped]. I am not proud about my performance, but this is the truth. This was Holmes' first defense."

EARNIE SHAVERS

MARCH 25, 1978, CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA • NON-TITLE BOUT • RESULT: HOLMES UD 12

SEPTEMBER 28, 1979, CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA • TITLE: WBC • RESULT: HOLMES TKO 11

"Maybe the best jab of any heavyweight that ever fought, maybe of any fighter that ever laced up a pair of gloves. Larry could win a fight with nothing but the jab, but luckily he had many other fine tools to go with it.

"I think I hit him with less punches in two fights than I did many guys in two rounds. He had a hard defense to penetrate, and he was able to adjust from our first fight and not get hit as much, minus the one shot that put him down. I hit Larry with one of the hardest shots I ever threw, knocked him down, and he told me hitting the ground woke him up and then he got mad. He was an extremely intelligent fighter and improved on our first fight and was able to stop me in the second match.

"I just remember being in awe of his skills. At his best I don't know if there is any heavyweight out there who could beat him. Even when he got older, he was still trouble for the second-tier guys, but in his prime he was a thing to behold."

TIM WITHERSPOON

MAY 20, 1983, DUNES HOTEL & CASINO, OUTDOOR ARENA, LAS VEGAS • TITLES: RING, WBC • RESULT: HOLMES SD 12

"I only had 15 professional fights and seven amateur fights. I think they figured Larry Holmes would win the fight against me because of my inexperience. They announced the fight and I thought it was too soon. My trainer, Slim Robinson, talked me into it. He said, 'Tim, you're going to whip his behind. C'mon, let's do it.' That's all I needed, because I trusted him. We started training; we were in Don King's camp. Nobody knew who I was. They heard about me coming up and that I was pretty good.

"We had this thing against each other; it went back and forth. A lot of people said I won. There were some fans who said he won. It was a doubt. There was name-calling. Late last year, they had an autograph signing – me, Ray Mercer, Larry Holmes, et cetera. I was sitting there signing autographs. I got up and I went over and apologized. We made our peace.

"I saw how courageous he was. He had heart; he'd get off the canvas and fight back. He fought a lot of hard fights and came out on top. He was a great boxer."

MIKE WEAVER

JUNE 22, 1979, MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK • TITLES: WBC • RESULT: HOLMES TKO 12

"Larry Holmes had the best jab. It was accurate and straight. It wasn't a hard jab; it was a good jab. Pinklon Thomas' jab was harder than Larry Holmes', but as far as being better and looking better, I say Holmes – it was faster. Larry Holmes knew what to do; he was a thinking fighter. He wasn't going to just run in there. Everything worked off his jab. I told Larry I ranked him in the top 10 best heavyweights of all time. He was determined. He could do it all."

JAMES SMITH

NOVEMBER 9, 1984, RIVIERA HOTEL & CASINO, OUTDOOR ARENA, LAS VEGAS • TITLES: RING, IBF • RESULT: HOLMES TKO 12

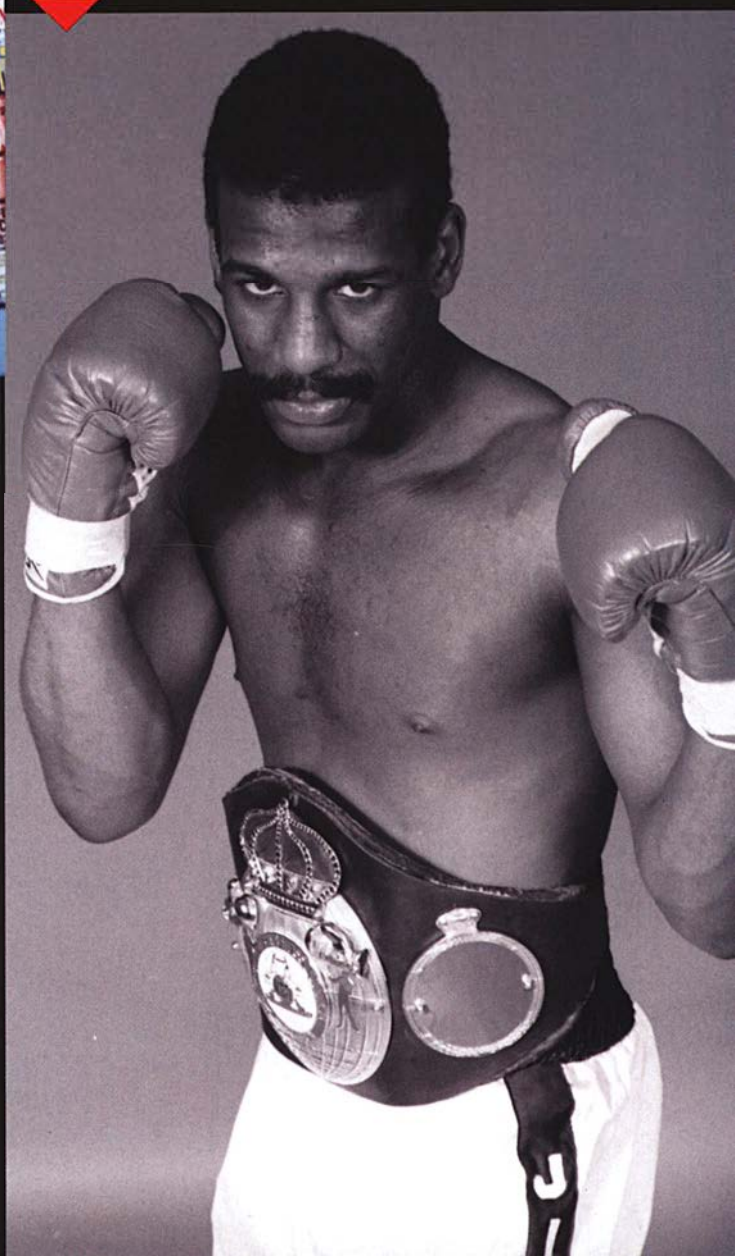
"I understand that Frank Bruno was going to fight Larry, but [Bruno] took me for a tune-up and I tuned him up (Bruno was knocked out in the 10th round). Larry had been heavyweight world champion three years before I turned pro; he had a lot of experience. I took him 12 rounds [before being stopped on cuts]; it was a good learning experience. He had a real good jab; it was hard and strong. He was tall, he was big, and he was quick with that jab. He learned from Muhammad Ali – real good jab. He had good head movement. He fought a lot of top guys – Ken Norton, Muhammad Ali. He was smart and very knowledgeable about boxing. Several guys got him in trouble and he was able to come back and beat them."

MICHAEL SPINKS

SEPTEMBER 21, 1985, RIVIERA HOTEL & CASINO, OUTDOOR ARENA, LAS VEGAS • TITLES: RING, IBF • RESULT: SPINKS UD 15

APRIL 19, 1986, LAS VEGAS HILTON, LAS VEGAS • TITLES: RING, IBF • RESULT: SPINKS SD 15

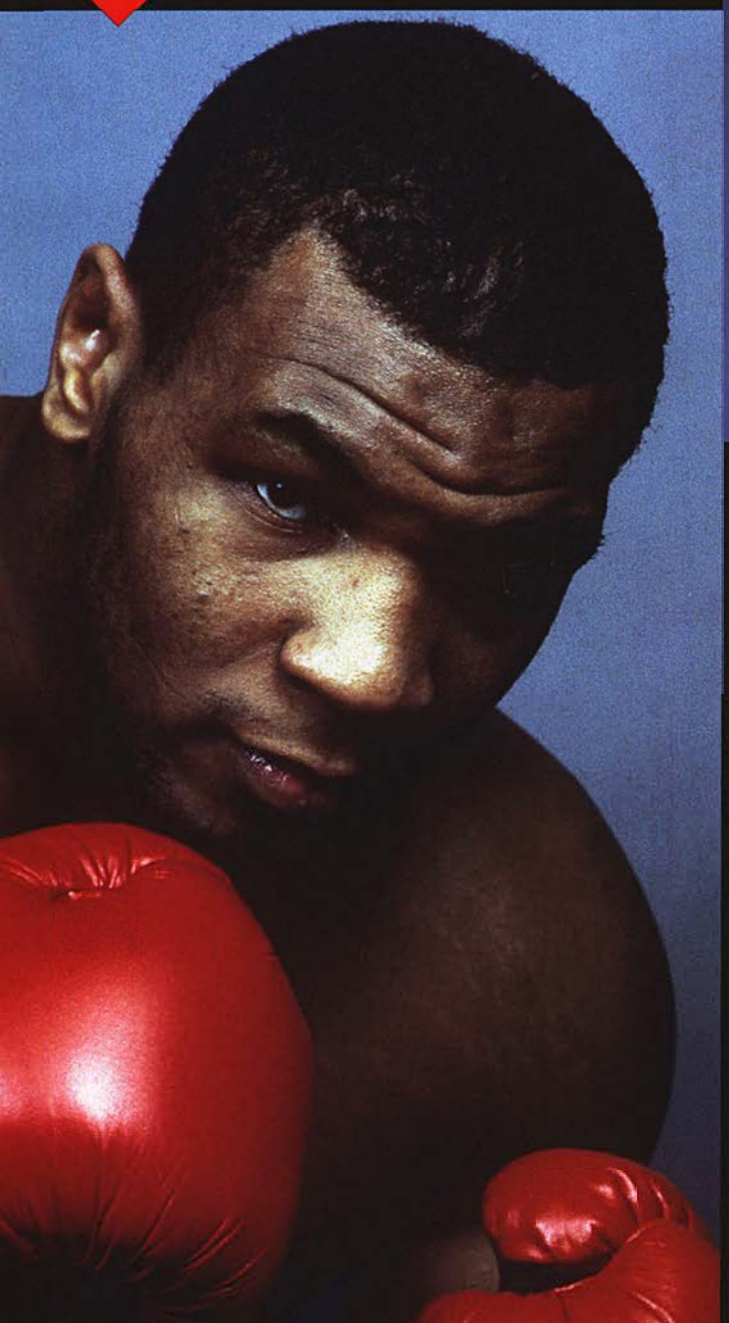
"Holmes was one of the smartest because he was very hard to hit. He had a real wicked defense where you'd try to hit him and he'd throw his hands out and pull you to the side. It was very hard to hit him. He was durable and he knew how to fight. It was like going in the ring with anyone else – he was tough. He wasn't no walk in the park. If you're not careful, you'll get knocked the fuck out!"

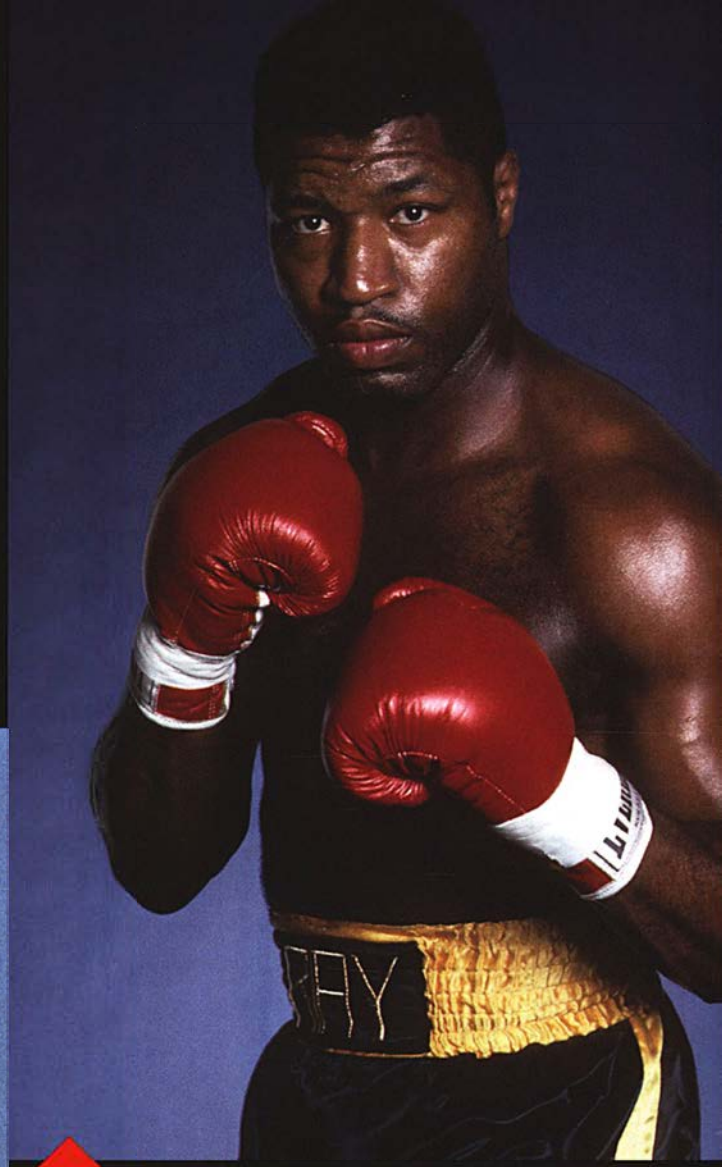


MIKE TYSON

JANUARY 22, 1988, CONVENTION CENTER, ATLANTIC CITY • TITLES: IBF, WBA, WBC • RESULT: TYSON TKO 4

"At his best, I thought Holmes was magnificent – the king of his time. Again, this was about avenging Ali (Holmes stopped an aging Ali in October 1980), but after the fight, I mimicked Jack Dempsey by being respectful. I said that Holmes was a great fighter, and that was the truth. Would it have been a harder fight if he was younger? Hell yeah! Check this out: He came out of retirement and hadn't fought for over two years when he fought me. But after that, he had 10 or 15 fights and started doing really good. He did really well with Evander Holyfield four years later."





RAY MERCER

FEBRUARY 7, 1992, CONVENTION CENTER, ATLANTIC CITY • NON-TITLE BOUT • RESULT: HOLMES UD 12

"I was the WBO heavyweight champion and was supposed to fight Michael Moorer and I really didn't want to fight a southpaw. They gave me the opportunity to fight Larry, so I gave up my belt to fight Larry Holmes, who is my idol. It was kind of weird. I was trying to beat him with everything I had. I got psyched out; he was holding the ropes, trying to throw a jab and talking to his wife in the audience. If it hadn't been for his wife, I'd have beat him. (laughs)

"I used to watch him as a kid. He had all the experience. He could be 30 percent in shape and 70 percent in the mind and still win. As I got older, I understood that. I learned how to throw my jab off Larry. He had one of the best jabs ever. I've got to give that to him; his jab was awesome. He used the jab for a lot of things – to hurt you, set up the right hand – he used it well."

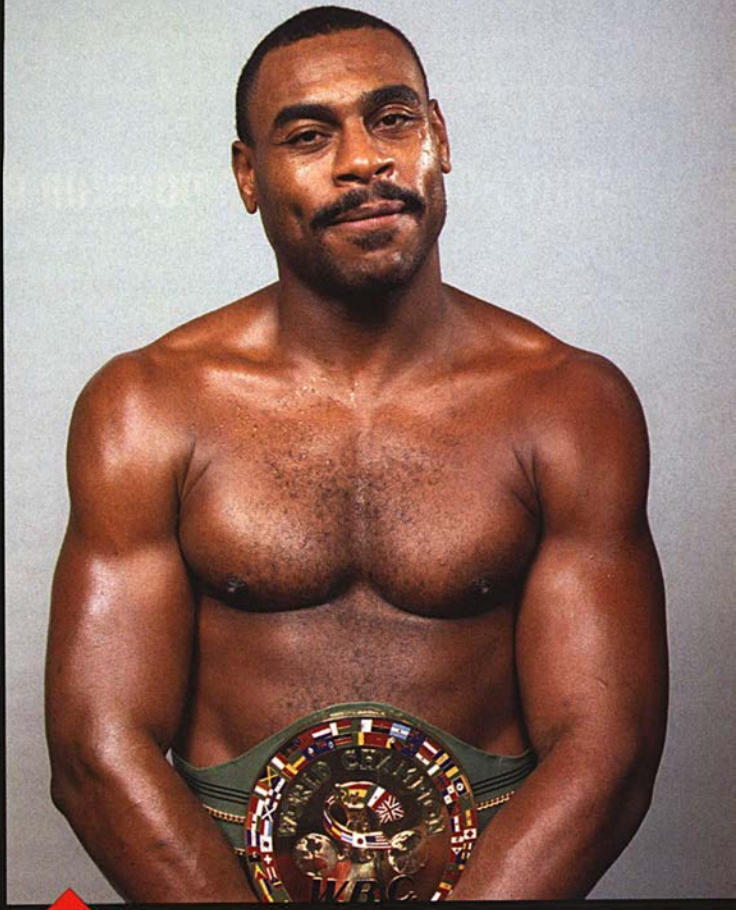
EVANDER HOLYFIELD

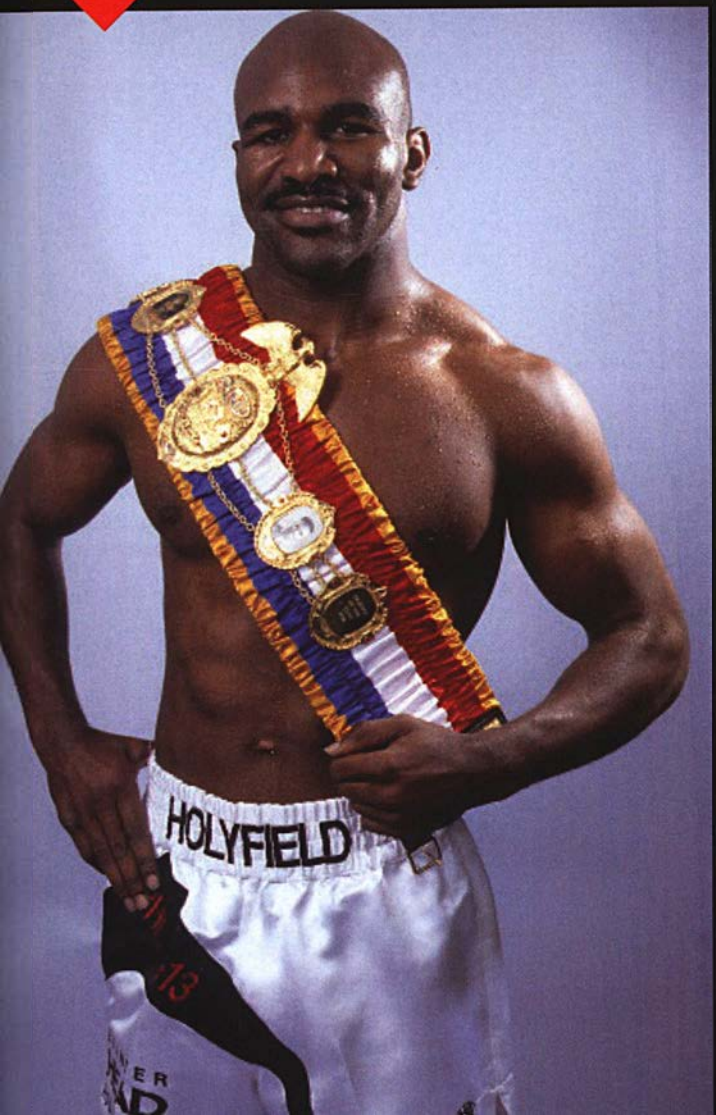
JUNE 19, 1992, CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS • TITLES: IBF, WBA, WBC • RESULT: HOLYFIELD UD 12

"I think I was about 19 years old when [Holmes] came down to Georgia; he came to a boxing match. You know how you size people up. I weighed about 147 pounds. (laughs) I was like, 'He's big.'

"I beat George [Foreman] and people wanted to see it. Even with George, I didn't want to fight him, because he was older. I knew I wouldn't get the credibility. But they paid so much money for me to fight him. They paid me $20 million [for Foreman]. With Larry Holmes, they gave me $15 million.

"The older guys are the crafty fighters; they know more than one way to beat you. George was the bigger puncher, but with Larry, he was quick; he had quick reflexes. I knew what type of fighter he was. He was rangy, good left jab. He was an awkward fighter – same thing: jab, jab, one-two. He made it more complicated because I fought at a faster pace than he fought. You had to pay close attention."





OLIVER MCCALL

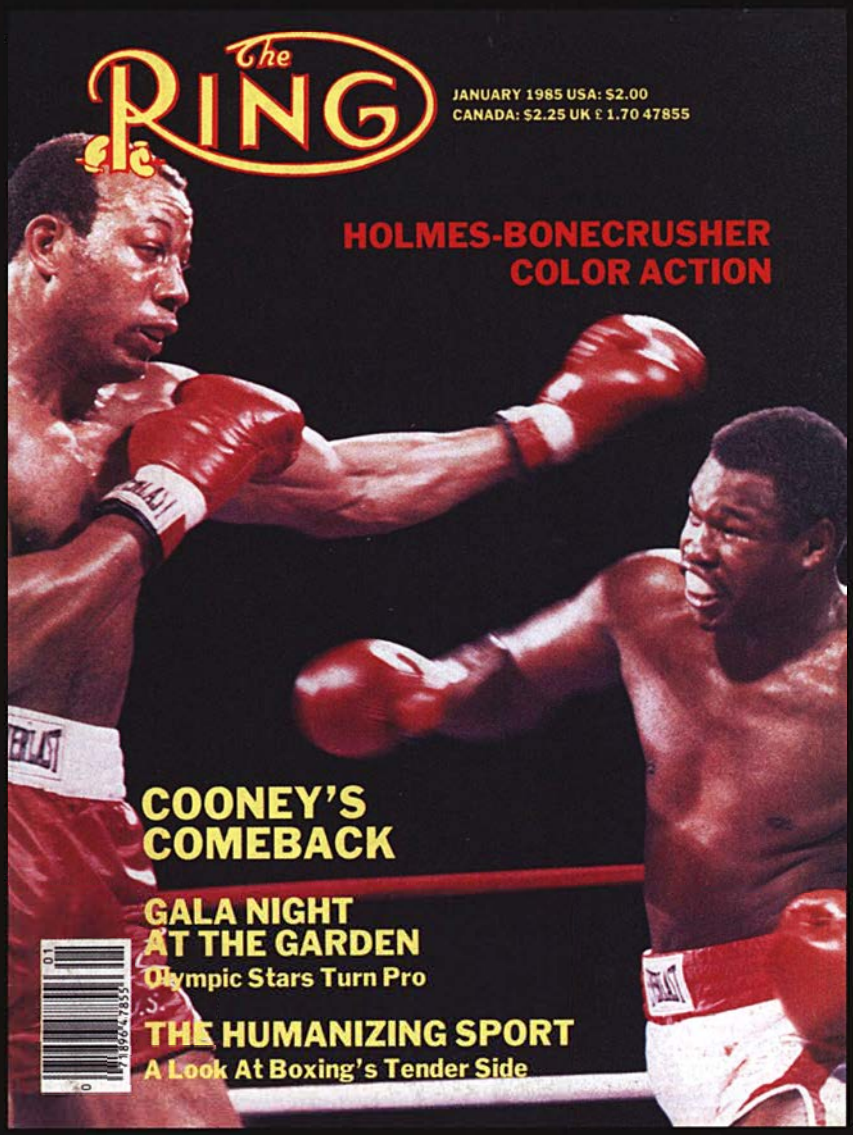
APRIL 8, 1995, CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS • TITLE: WBC • RESULT: MCCALL UD 12

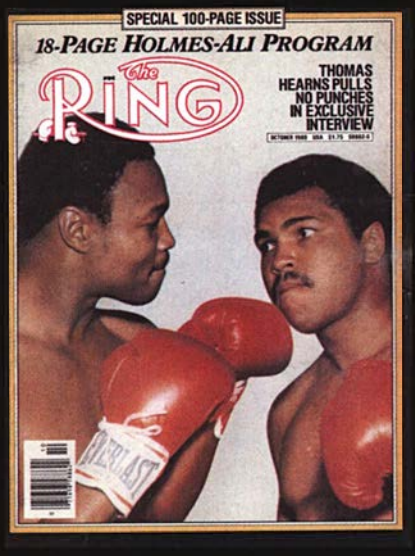
"Larry Holmes definitely had the best jab. In the fight, he gave me a lot of problems by having such a quick, long right hand that made the jab more effective. He had a stiff jab. The jab I experienced from Larry Holmes was the jab that I seen him use when I was a young kid, when he was heavyweight champion. I actually caught on to it a bit coming up, and it helped me use my jab more.

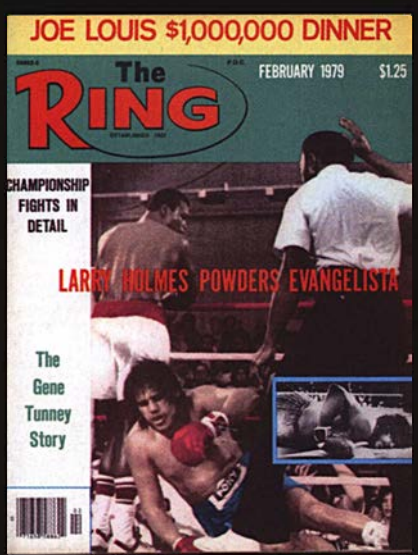
"Him winning that fight with Ray Mercer, that's what made the fight with me that much harder, because I believe Larry Holmes thought, 'I just whooped an Army sergeant.' So he thought he could do the same with me. I would have to say Larry Holmes [was the best I fought] as far as pure boxing skills. Me at my best and him at 25 percent [when we fought] and him being champion when I was a kid. He's my dude as far as skills. As well as boxing skills, he could do the other things. He learned not to make the same mistake twice. He learned when he got knocked down how to get up and still beat you down. Stuff like that. He had to put up with a lot of criticism. He was a great champion and it was a trip for me to face him." RING

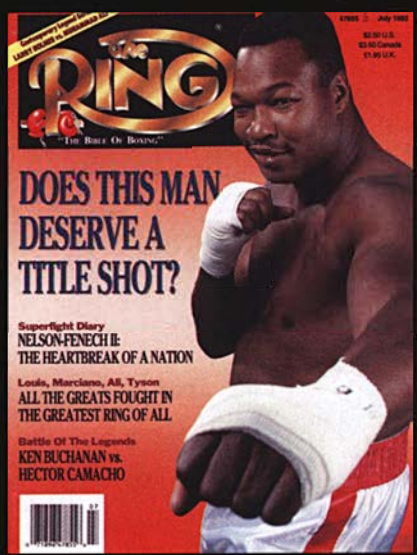
Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

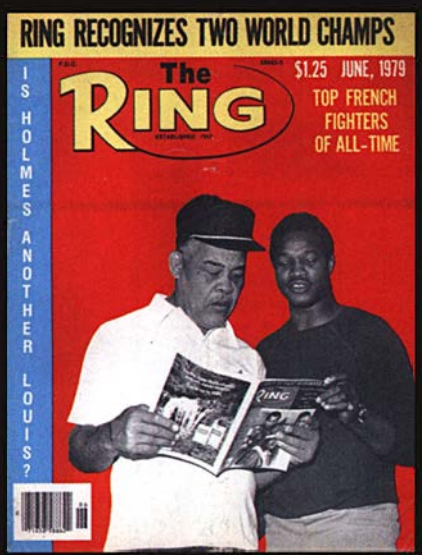
LARRY HOLMES' CHAMPIONSHIP DEFENSES

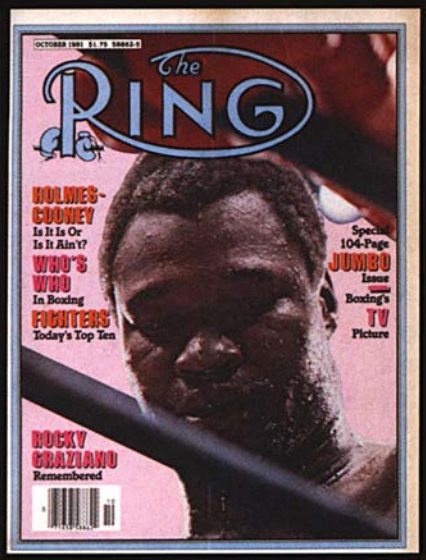


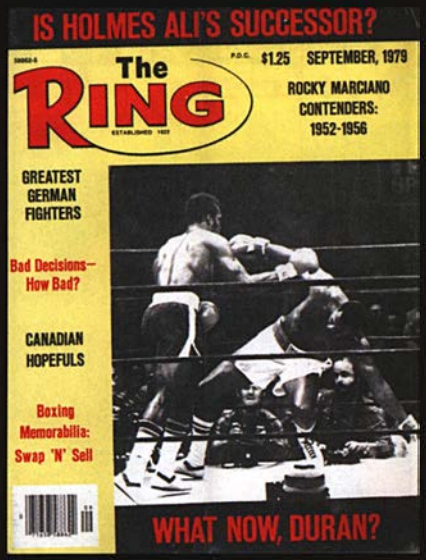


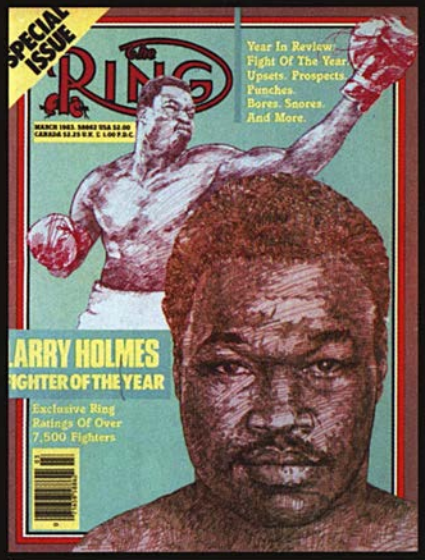






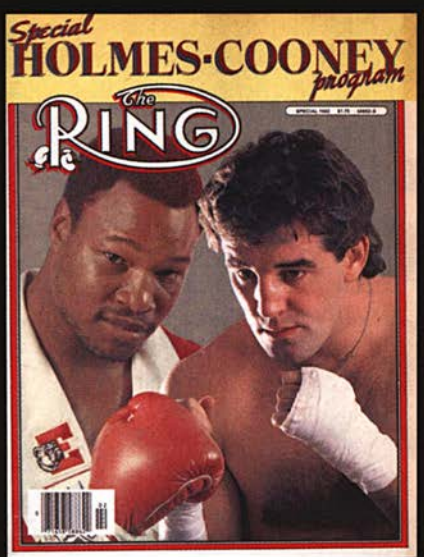


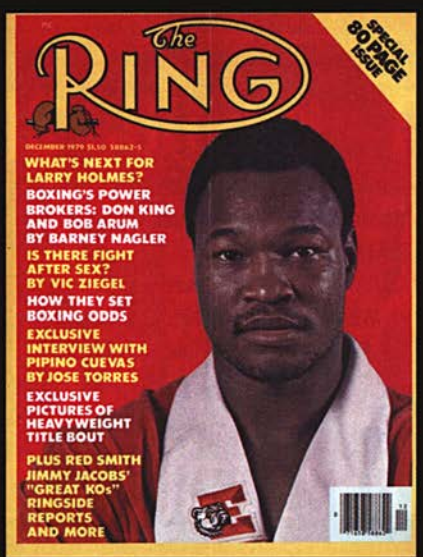




TWENTY'S PLENTY

Nov. 10, 1978	**Alfredo Evangelista**	Caesars Palace, Las Vegas	KO 7
March 23, 1979	**Ossie Ocasio**	Hilton Pavilion, Las Vegas	TKO 7
June 22, 1979	**Mike Weaver**	Madison Square Garden, NYC	TKO 12
Sept. 28, 1979	**Earnie Shavers**	Caesars Palace, Las Vegas	TKO 11
Feb. 3, 1980	**Lorenzo Zanon**	Caesars Palace, Las Vegas	KO 6
March 31, 1980	**Leroy Jones**	Caesars Palace, Las Vegas	TKO 8
July 7, 1980	**Scott LeDoux**	Metropolitan Sports Center, Bloomington, Minn.	TKO 7
Oct. 2, 1980	**Muhammad Ali**	Caesars Palace, Las Vegas	TKO 10
April 11, 1981	**Trevor Berbick**	Caesars Palace, Las Vegas	UD 15
June 12, 1981	**Leon Spinks**	Joe Louis Arena, Detroit	TKO 3
Nov. 6, 1981	**Renaldo Snipes**	Civic Arena, Pittsburgh	TKO 11
June 11, 1982	**Gerry Cooney**	Caesars Palace, Las Vegas	TKO 13
Nov. 26, 1982	**Randall "Tex" Cobb**	Astrodome, Houston	UD 15
March 27, 1983	**Lucien Rodriguez**	Watres Armory, Scranton, Penn.	UD 12
May 20, 1983	**Tim Witherspoon**	Dunes Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas	SD 12
Sept. 10, 1983	**Scott Frank**	Harrah's Marina Hotel Casino, Atlantic City	TKO 5
Nov. 25, 1983	**Marvis Frazier**	Caesars Palace, Las Vegas	TKO 1
Nov. 9, 1984	**James "Bonecrusher" Smith**	Riviera Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas	TKO 12
March 15, 1985	**David Bey**	Riviera Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas	TKO 10
May 20, 1985	**Carl "The Truth" Williams**	Lawlor Events Center, Reno, Nevada	UD 15





COMING UP

Katie Taylor's undisputed lightweight championship defense against Amanda Serrano may be the biggest fight in women's boxing history.

MARCH

MARCH 12 – Leigh Wood vs. Michael Conlan, featherweights, Nottingham, England (DAZN).

MARCH 19 – Vergil Ortiz Jr. vs. Michael McKinson, welterweights, Los Angeles (DAZN).

MARCH 19 – Masamichi Yabuki vs. Kenshiro Teraji, junior flyweights (for Yabuki's WBC title), Kyoto, Japan.

MARCH 19 – Sunny Edwards vs. Muhammad Waseem, flyweights (for Edwards' IBF title), Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

MARCH 26 – Kiko Martinez vs. Josh Warrington, featherweights (for Martinez's IBF title), Leeds, England (DAZN).

MARCH 29 – Petchmanee CP Freshmart vs. Wanheng Menayothin, strawweights (for Freshmart's WBC title), Thailand.

APRIL

APRIL 9 – Ryan Garcia vs. Emmanuel Tagoe, lightweights, San Antonio, Texas (DAZN).

APRIL 16 – Errol Spence Jr. vs. Yordenis Ugas, welterweights (for Spence's IBF/WBC and Ugas' WBA titles), Arlington, Texas (PPV).

APRIL 22 – John Riel Casimero vs. Paul Butler, bantamweights (for Casimero's WBO title), Liverpool, England.

APRIL 23 – Tyson Fury vs. Dillian Whyte, heavyweights (for Fury's Ring/WBC titles), U.K. (PPV).

APRIL 30 – Katie Taylor vs. Amanda Serrano, lightweights (for Taylor's undisputed championship), New York (DAZN). Also, Franchon Crews-Dezurn vs. Elin Cederroos, super middleweights (for vacant Ring, Crews-Dezurn's WBC/WBO and Cederroos' IBF/WBA titles); Jessie Vargas vs. Liam Smith, junior middleweights.

APRIL 30 – Shakur Stevenson vs. Oscar Valdez, junior lightweights (for Stevenson's WBO and Valdez's WBC titles), Las Vegas (ESPN/ESPN+).

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